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**ANCIENT and MEDIEVAL
ETHIOPIAN HISTORY
to 1270**

**"The study of history
is the best medicine
for a sick mind"**

LIVY

**BY
SERGEW HABLE SELASSIE**
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**Addis Ababa
1972**



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To those Ethiopians and Foreigners who
Contributed to the Ethiopian Studies.

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P R E F A C E

Since 1961 when I began teaching Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History at the old University College of Addis Ababa, I have been interested in writing a book on the same subject. As the sources were scattered in different places, I realized that the task was not an easy one. Fortunately the Haile Sellassie I University provided me with all facilities so that I was able to visit various places and collect material. For the same purpose, I was released from my teaching assignments for one semester in 1963 and spent the time on research in Northern Ethiopia. The financial and moral support of my University encouraged me to take the matter more seriously and in 1965 I produced the first draft. Hereafter, I continued to work on this manuscript, improving the text and adding more material until 1967.

Another occasion was offered to me to concentrate on this work. In the 1967-68 academic year, I was granted sabbatical leave and the British Council agreed to pay my air fare to London. There I had a chance to consult many printed works and manuscripts in the British Museum. Meanwhile through the energetic efforts of Dr. Abebe Ambatchew, then Secretary General of Ethiopian National Commission for UNESCO, I received a fellowship of six months from UNESCO and this helped me to work under better conditions. I am deeply obliged to the above Institutions and to Dr. Abebe Ambatchew.

At the same time I recall with great pleasure the hospitality and encouragement I received from Dr. Eguale Gebre Yohannes, then Councillor at the Imperial Ethiopian Embassy in Bonn and now Head of Cultural Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He did all he could to assist in the success of my work. He deserves many many thanks for his generosity, constructive criticism and wise advice.

Many other friends and colleagues also helped me in one way or another. Particular mention is due to Dr. Abraham Demoz, Ex-Dean of Arts at Haile Sellassie I University, and Dr. Merid Welde Aregay, Assistant Professor of History in the same institution. The former sought to establish a fellowship during the period of my sabbatical leave and the latter lent me his best advice which I found very useful.

Editing and typing the work involved many people. W/ro Belaynesh Mikael of the Haile Sellassie I University Press helped me in editing part of the manuscript. Mrs. M. White, from Britain edited the second half and typed it. My wife Selamawit and W/ro Mulu Alem Mengistu volunteered to type the draft. I thank all of them very much indeed.

Sergew Hable Sellassie
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ABBREVIATIONS

AE	— <i>Annales d'Éthiopie.</i>
ACISE	— <i>Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi Etiopici.</i>
AION	— <i>Annuario dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli.</i>
AIOUN	— <i>Annuario dell'Istituto Universitario di Napoli.</i>
Bi. Or.	— <i>Bibliotheca Orientalis.</i>
BSAC	— <i>Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte.</i>
BSGI	— <i>Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana.</i>
BSOAS	— <i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.</i>
CIH	— <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum, pars quarta, Inscriptiones Himyariticas et Sabaeas.</i>
CSCO	— <i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium.</i>
DAE	— <i>Deutsche Aksum-Expedition</i>
EI	— <i>Encyclopaedia of Islam.</i>
FHG	— <i>Fragm. Hist. Graec.</i>
GGM	— <i>Geographi Graeci Minores, ed. C. Mueller.</i>
GCS	— <i>Geschichte der Christlichen Schriftsteller.</i>
JA	— <i>Journal Asiatique.</i>
JEA	— <i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology.</i>
JES	— <i>Journal of Ethiopian Studies.</i>
JSS	— <i>Journal of Semetic Studies.</i>
JESHO	— <i>Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient.</i>
JRAS	— <i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.</i>
Migne P.G.	— <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca.</i>
Migne P.L.	— <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Latina.</i>
OM	— <i>Oriente Moderno.</i>
Patr. Or.	— <i>Patrologia Orientalis.</i>
PICES	— <i>Proceedings of the third International Conference of the Ethiopian Studies.</i>
RE	— <i>Real Encyclopaedie.</i>
ROC	— <i>Revue de l'Orient Chrétien.</i>
RRAL	— <i>Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Licei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche.</i>
RSO	— <i>Rassegna di Studi Orientali.</i>
RSE	— <i>Rassegna di Studi Etiopici.</i>
ZA	— <i>Zeitschrift fuer Assyriologie.</i>
ZDMG	— <i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlaendischen Gesellschaft.</i>

Transliteration

The transliteration of Ethiopian words still remains problematic. So far few efforts have been made to solve this problem and the result of such efforts has not earned the recognition of a large number of the scholars concerned. I think it would take quite a long time to apply a uniform transliteration.

The transliteration used in this book is based partly on suggestions made by the Ethiopian Languages Department of Haile Sellassie I University and partly results from modification for the purpose of simplicity. I also left those words whose spelling has been already accepted largely as they are, such as Addis Ababa, Meskal etc. Besides lack of diacritics I did not use the necessary signs on the palantalized consonants. It shall also be noted that the fall of the accent in each word is very important. If the accent falls on the first syllable the second should not necessarily be transliterated. This is mostly happens in the sixth order. For example in the case of Amde Sion there is no need to transliterate the second syllable like this *Amide*, simply because the accent falls on the first syllable. Such cases are many and should be kept in mind.

In general the transliteration applied in this book is as follows:

a) The seven orders:

υ = he, υ = hu, ζ = hi, γ = ha, ζ = hé, υ = hi, υ = ho.

b) Letters

he = ሀ ሐ ሰ ሠ ሡ ሢ

le = ለ

me = ሙ

se = ሙ ሰ ስ

re = ረ

she = ሸ

qe = ቀ

be = ቦ

te = ተ

che = ቸ

ne = ነ

gne = ኘ

a = አ ሰ ሶ

ke = ከ

we = ወ

ze = ዘ

ze = ኘ

ye = የ

de = ደ

je = ጆ

ge = ገ

te = ጠ

tche = ጪ

pe = ሸ

se = ሸ ሰ ስ

fe = ፈ

pe = ፑ

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ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL ETHIOPIAN HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

I. Summary of Ethiopian Historiography

A. Internal Development

In ancient times around the Mediterranean and Red Sea and also between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, a high civilization developed which has had great significance for our planet. The people of this area were the first people who recorded history. They undoubtedly contributed greatly to world civilization as such. If we examine the geographical location of these countries, we find that they were located either near big rivers or on the sea coasts.

As we know, Ethiopia has a favourable geographical position that fulfills these conditions; it is near the Red Sea and the great river, the Blue Nile, has its source in this country. We can therefore classify Ethiopia among those countries which developed an ancient civilization.

Unfortunately, however, the civilization of Ethiopia is not yet as well-known as that of other countries. Ethiopia was isolated from the outside world from the 9th century A.D., and thereafter the Dark Ages followed. Furthermore, in those centuries she was often plagued by civil wars. War always brings catastrophe to any kind of national heritage. The civil wars which occurred from time to time in Ethiopia destroyed many historical monuments. At that time Ethiopians were pre-occupied with these wars and could not devote much attention to their history. Moreover, the European countries were less interested in Ethiopia than in the other countries which surrounded the Mediterranean and Red Sea, and they applied their efforts to the reconstruction of the past of those other countries whose civilization was lost.¹ Archaeological centres have been developed where scholars are researching, excavating and studying. In Ethiopia not a single institution of this kind existed before 1952. No one is to blame for that; I mention this merely to point out why the civilization of other countries is better known than ours. Had there been even one research centre here before, it would have enabled many to contribute to the project of reconstructing this country's history. This of course, does not mean that we completely lack sources for Ethiopian history. When Ethiopian historians developed historiography they used a number of sources.

We find today in Ethiopian manuscripts lists of Ethiopian emperors of the past together with some scattered notes. This recording method is Biblical. Ethiopian writers took the Biblical genealogy as an example. Accordingly they prepared lists of kings, but each writer drew up his own list which sometimes differs fundamentally from all the others. Such lists are important for the earlier periods of Ethiopian history: Aksumite and Medi-

1. What was said in *Antiquity* about the interest of Europeans in Ethiopia is very characteristic: "Abyssinia remains almost unexplored even to this day. It is regarded by modern Europeans much in the same way as ancient Britain was regarded by the Romans in the days of Julius Caesar." *Antiquity* 1 (1927), p.355.

eval. The first scholar who tried to collect and co-ordinate the different lists was C. Conti Rossini. With the help of other scholars, he collected 86 different lists from Ethiopian manuscripts which are located in various European libraries. Some were also found in Eritrea, which was at that time an Italian colony. These lists he divided into eight groups according to their similarities and the number of kings, and he categorized them as A,B,C,D,E,F,G, and H.

Group A contains 47 names from Bazen to Delna'ad; B has 69 names from 33 different manuscripts from Ebne Hakim to Delna'ad; C, 91 names from Arwé to Delna'ad; F, 32 names from Ebne Elhakim to Delna'ad; G, 74 names from Menelik to Delna'ad; and H, 25 names from Ebne Hakim to Lozay. Some of these lists include the date of the reign of each king; for example, group G and to some extent also H. The rest mention only the names of the Emperors.²

This work of Conti Rossini was, by and large, descriptive and to a certain extent analytical. Of course it is far from being comparative. This gap was filled prior to Conti Rossini's work by a French scholar, E. Drouin³, who succeeded in proving that at least some names of the lists of the kings corresponded to the historical names found on Aksumite coins of Ethiopian Emperors. However, the value of these lists for the ancient history of Ethiopia is marginal. In this respect their importance lies in their usefulness, at least temporarily, in filling some of the gaps in Ethiopian history. The primary sources are very scant in the ancient and medieval periods and the time span is immense. Historical continuity will be impossible unless we use secondary sources like the lists. But for that purpose, we must have one representative list. I believe this could be achieved through intensive and systematic study of different lists. Today we have more such lists from the 15th century onwards and a comparative study of all these could result in one authoritative list.⁴

The second tentative source is to be found in the chronicles. The first of these is the chronicle of Amde-Sion (1314-1344). This Emperor was deeply concerned that the history of his Empire should be recorded. He appointed special persons to deal generally with the history of the emperors, with emphasis on his own time. These men were called ጸሐፊት ትእዛዛት.⁵ They worked under the supervision of አዛዥ (principal). Their main function was to write whatever the principal dictated. After that, they took the written chronicles to the emperor for approval. If there was something displeasing to the emperor, he could order a change; or if there were some points which the writers had not sufficiently stressed, he would ask for improvement.⁶ It is characteristic of the Ethiopian chroniclers to exaggerate the good works of the emperor and to ignore completely the baser aspects. Few chronicles contain any criticism of the king. There is still the Ethiopian proverb «እግዚር አይውቀስ ንጉሥ አይከሰስ». (God cannot be blamed and the Emperor cannot be accused). Moreover the writer could not adopt a critical attitude since he was a servant of the emperor who also exercised strict

2. C. Conti Rossini, "Les listes des rois d'Aksoum": JA 14 (1909).

3. E. Drouin, "Les listes royales éthiopiennes et leur autorité historique": *Revue Archéologique*, n.s. 44 (1882).

4. In my research visit to Gojjam, particularly in Debre Marqos and Mertula Mariam, I copied different lists from different manuscripts, some with chronology. Their dates vary from the 15th century to the dawn of the 20th century.

5. This title is retained even today in the Imperial Court of Ethiopia. The high official, today with a rank of minister who is responsible for administration and protocol of the Imperial Court, is called "ጸሐፊ ትእዛዛት".

6. Tekle Sadik Mekuria, *A History of Ethiopia from the Reign of Libne Dingil to Tewodros II*, (Addis Ababa, 1952), (Amharic), p. 2 ff.

control over him.

Although the earliest chronicles which we know today were composed in the 14th century, their content goes as far back as the beginning of Ethiopian history. The reason for this was that the chronicler had to prove the historical genealogical continuity of the emperor, because this had tremendous importance for political stability and the personal existence of the emperor.⁷ In theory, at least, an emperor who could not claim direct descent from the Queen of Sheba and Menelik, would be disqualified automatically as illegitimate.⁸ In planning his work the chronicler could employ alternative methods. Either he could use the genealogical list of the previous emperors, as an introductory part of his book or he could employ a short narrative method for the important predecessors. In the first case, it is hard to verify his accuracy, but if the second method was employed at least he had a stereotyped knowledge of history.

There is also another type of historiography which was applied in Ethiopia in the past - hagiographical. The authors were devout Christians and their motives and objectives were quite different from the chroniclers. Hagiographers were not paid writers and their objective was to praise and glorify the giants of the faith. This is why their works were termed in Ethiopic 'gedle' which literally means 'struggle'. The chronicler wrote exclusively about the achievements of emperors, but an hagiographer indiscriminately composed a book for an emperor or for a single monk, since both triumphed in the struggle of faith. In narrating the struggles of a saint, he could not avoid describing his life story in detail, from his childhood to his death. If the saint was of the ruling class, mention was made of his genealogical line, the political and social situation of the time, his cultural background and his role in the expansion and the consolidation of Christianity in the country. Sometimes the role was a critical one and hence such narratives are of great assistance in checking the information in the chronicles.

The beginning of the Era of the Princes in the history of Ethiopia in the second half of the 18th century inaugurated a new era in the historiography of the country. As it is known, during this period the power of the central government was challenged very seriously and many times the monarch was overshadowed completely by local governors who had become important not because of their birth but through their personal qualities and military achievements. This sudden change of attitude had a far-reaching impact on historiography. In the first place, it virtually disqualified the royal court chroniclers. Individuals began to be interested in history and they started to compose chronicles on their own initiative. Their motives were to record the events which happened during their times. As such, they do not lack objectivity in their approach, though they may have had sympathy with one party or another. In this way, the recording of history was no longer a monopoly of the monarch but the common prerogative of those who played a certain role in the events.⁹

After almost a century, the power of the monarchy was restored by Tewodros II in 1855. Again, official chroniclers were appointed to resume their work, but this did

7. The ceremony of the coronation of an emperor reveals how important it was for the Prince who was due to be crowned to trace his genealogy to Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. See M. de Almeida, *Some Records of Ethiopia*, 1593-1646, ed. and trans. C. F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford, (Hakluyt Society, London, 1954), p. 92 ff.

8. An exception can be recalled in the case of Tewodros II. But even he, in the last years of his reign, claimed to be a descendant of Solomon. See S. Rubenson, *King of Kings, Tewodros of Ethiopia*, (Addis Ababa, 1966), p. 49.

9. This is very clear from the chronicle published by H.J. Weld Blundell, *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia*, (Cambridge, 1922).

not discourage individuals from recording the events of their times. This is why we have today three chronicles of Tewodros II from different persons, the first of which is ascribed to *Aleqa Zenab* and published by E. Littmann¹⁰ and later translated into Italian by M.M. Moreno.¹¹ The second is attributed to *Aleqa Welde Mariam*. This was published and translated into French by C. Mondon-Vidailhet.¹² The author of the third chronicle remains anonymous; it was published and translated into Italian by L. Fusella.¹³

Zenab was the court chronicler of the Emperor Tewodros II, but he did not follow strictly the method and approach of the previous chroniclers. He had greater freedom in expressing independent views than his predecessors and consequently he avoided exaggerating the facts. His work does not contain the customary introduction in which the Emperor was highly praised in comparison with one of the Biblical figures. He was more precise and accurate in describing the events which he witnessed while at the Emperor's court. The work, however, remained incomplete for unknown reasons. It stopped in the year 1862 and so he omitted the last dramatic years of the reign of Emperor Tewodros.

Welde Mariam was not a court chronicler; in his youth he was among the close circle of Abuna Selama III, Metropolitan of Ethiopia.¹⁴ In this capacity he observed events and gained experience. Since he wrote the book in 1881, thirteen years after the death of the Emperor, it is quite clear that his intention was to record history as such. Although his approach was not to inaugurate a new method, his description, which in fact, is brief, does not seem to be prejudiced against one party or the other. This is characteristic of his book which covers the life of Tewodros from his birth to his suicide at Maqdaia in 1868.

At present the author of the third chronicle of Tewodros remains anonymous. His name cannot be traced from any passage in the text. From certain phrases and expressions, however, Fusella thinks that the author was of Tigré origin.¹⁵ He started to compose the history of Tewodros on his own initiative and as he mentions in the conclusion of his book, he intended to write the history of Tekle Giorgis and Yohannes IV. This means that he wrote (or rather completed) this chronicle after the accession of Yohannes IV to the throne. The material is better organised than that of the other two chronicles.

While the earlier chronicles were, without exception, written in the classical language, Ge'ez, these three chronicles were written in Amharic, the spoken language of the country. This event in itself is an important step forward in the history of Ethiopian historiography. Furthermore, the older chronicles were characterized by exaggeration and to a certain extent by inaccuracy; but the later ones were concise and concrete. The writers of the oldest chronicles were court historians who were under the control of the emperor, but most of the authors of the last century were motivated by their own initiative to record the facts of their time as they were. Their work has historical character and is important as source material. The initiative displayed by these three authors had a certain impact on future historical writing. In the anonymous chronicle of Yohannes IV,¹⁶ which is composed in Ge'ez, the author is precise and exact in his expressions.

10. Zenab, *The Chronicle of King Theodore of Abyssinia*, ed. Littmann, (Princeton, 1902).

11. M.M. Moreno, "La cronaca di re Teodoro attribuita al dabbatà 'Zanab'", *RSE* 2 (1942), pp. 143-180.

12. Welde Mariam, *Chronique de Théodoros II, roi des rois d'Éthiopie* (1853-1868), ed. and trans. C. Mondon-Vidailhet, (Paris, 1904).

13. *La cronaca dell'Imperatore Teodoro II di Etiopia in un manoscritto amaro: AIUON*, nuova serie 6, 7 and 8 (1957-1959).

14. Welde Mariam, *Chronique de Théodoros II*, p. vi; compare Amharic text, p. 41.

15. L. Fusella, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

16. "Histoire du Roi des Rois, 'Asé Iohannes (1868-1889)", ed. and trans. M. Chaine: *Revue Sémitique*, 22 (1913), pp. 178-191.

He covers the history of Ethiopia from 1868 to 1888 until the occupation of Massawa by the Italians. Later Gebre Selassie, the court chronicler of Emperor Menelik II produced a chronicle in Amharic.¹⁷ Gebre Selassie follows the pattern of the previous court chroniclers. In one aspect only does he differ from them, that is in language. All the previous official court chroniclers, except Zenab, compiled their works in the classical language, Ge'ez; but Gebre Selassie composed in the vernacular, Amharic. In this respect he enjoys originality, together with Zenab.

At the dawn of the 20th century, the development of Ethiopian historiography took a step forward. In recording history, historians who had been resigned to the old type of chronicle, started to see the events in their interrelation and described them as such, adding their personal views. The first writer of this new school was Afewerq Gebre Yesus. When he was in Italy, he wrote the history of Menelik II¹⁸ on his own initiative. In this book he sometimes expresses vehement criticism of the Emperor Yohannes but he glorifies Menelik II constantly. He justified himself by saying that he did not do so in order to obtain favour and high position but because he admired Menelik sincerely. No doubt he was aware of the facts of that time, but he had a great affection for the Emperor Menelik II, and he therefore always tried to justify the facts according to his sentiments. On the other hand, he had no concrete evidence on which to base his arguments.

The second work of this kind was published in Amharic by *Aleqa Taye*,¹⁹ a well-educated Ethiopian. When the Kaiser, Wilhelm II of Germany, asked Menelik II to send a lecturer in Amharic to the University of Berlin, he was selected and sent to Germany where he spent a long time as lecturer while at the same time studying. When he returned home he wrote the above-mentioned book. Unfortunately, this book does not do justice to his erudition and does not reflect his true ability. He did not base his work on reliable sources and secondly, he was not at all systematic. In his book, he discusses how different races and ethnic groups of Ethiopia were formed and what they have done according to tradition and legend. The title of his book is appropriate: *Ethnography of Ethiopia*.

One author of this period who wrote an interesting history was *Blatténgeta Hiruy Welde Selassie*.²⁰ His work is a short historical record of Ethiopia. The author intended to record Ethiopian history in detail and for this reason, he chose the title "The Vigil", meaning metaphorically to celebrate to-morrow the history of the Kings of Ethiopia for his printed work on the history of Ethiopia. This book is divided into two parts. The first part deals with political history from the dawn of Ethiopian history to our times; and the second part treats the history of the Ethiopian Church from the time of its foundation to the present day. He strove for accuracy, but the sources upon which his work was based precluded his success.

Another Ethiopian who wrote a general history of Ethiopia in Amharic is Birhanu Dinké.²¹ As the Imperial Chief Archivist, he had the opportunity to read many chronicles and documents and hence, as an amateur, he wrote this book. It comprises only forty-four pages with preface and introduction. It might well be the shortest of its kind.

17. Gebre Selassie, *Tarik Zemen Zedagmawi Menelik Nigussa Negest Ze Ityopya (Chronicle of Menelik II)*, ed. Mersie Hazen Welde Qirqos (Addis Ababa, 1967) Translated in 1930 into French by Tesfa Selassie and annotated and edited by de Coppet in Paris, under the title *Chronique du règne de Ménélik II, roi des rois d'Éthiopie*.

18. Afewerq Gebre Yesus, *Dagmawi Menelik (Menelik II)*, (Roma, 1901).

19. Aleqa Taye, *Ya Ityopya Hizb Tarik, (History of the Ethiopian People)*, (Addis Ababa, 1955).

20. Blatténgeta Hiruy Welde-Selassie, *Wazéma, (The Vigil)*, (Addis Ababa, 1929).

21. Birhanu Dinké, *Ya Ityopya Achir Tarik, (A Short History of Ethiopia)*, (Addis Ababa, 1952).

Basing his knowledge on experience and local sources, *Dejazmatch* Birhane Meskal Desta produced a history of the Zagwé period.²² Apart from his motives and arguments, the writer can be considered original in the sense that he was devoted to his subject, which has been ignored completely by chroniclers and to a certain extent by later historians.

The sources used by these writers are usually oral or written legends and chronicles. They have not sought first-hand sources such as inscriptions, coins, letters, decrees, etc., although they were available. The *Kibre Negest* has often served as the basic source. Apart from that, chronicles, hagiographical and other legendary sources were used without questioning their accuracy. As a rule, one can perhaps say that no Ethiopians who have dealt so far with the history of Ethiopia, have used authoritative sources as material for their works. Their approach differs, however, from the chroniclers.

The man who has tried to use authoritative sources is Tekle Sadik Mekuria. He has recorded Ethiopian history from very ancient times to the present day. He began by first writing about modern times from Tewodros II to Haile Sellassie I (1855–1941).²³ Part II of his work covers the period from Libna Dingil to Tewodros II (1508–1855),²⁴ and part III from the remote times to the end of the Zagwé Dynasty (c.1270).²⁵ The fourth part covers the Solomonian Dynasty from (1270 to 1508),²⁶ thereby gradually proceeding through all the periods of Ethiopian history. The task is a difficult one and demands patience. Tekle Sadik is the first Ethiopian to have written such an extensive, and to some extent systematic, work in Amharic. His sources are both primary and secondary and he has attempted to use the latter selectively. In spite of his effort, however, he did not succeed.

A non-Ethiopian who has recorded history in Amharic is G. M. Gasparini.²⁷ Although he utilized original sources, he was not in a position to systematize the material. The Middle Ages and modern times are covered in such a very sketchy way that there is little of substance in the work.

Recently, in 1967, Yilma Deressa published a book on the history of Ethiopia in the 16th century.²⁸ It consists of two major parts: the struggle of the Christians against the Moslems and the expansion of the Galla population in the high plateau, with no indication of sources (Alvares,²⁹ Castanhoso,³⁰ Arab Faqih,³¹ etc.) He has not made use of chronicles and other source material available in Ge'ez. The merit of this author lies perhaps in presenting such a concise book for the first time in Amharic.³² In the second

22. *Dejazmach* Birhane Meskal Desta, *Zéna Lal Yibelal, (Lalibela)*, (Addis Ababa, 1958).

23. Tekle Sadik Mekuria, *Ya Ityopya Tarik Ka Asé Tewodros eska Qadamawi Haile Sellasie I*, (Addis Ababa, 1960 E.C.), (fifth edition).

24. Tekle Sadik Mekuria, *Ya Ityopya Tarik Ka Asé Libne - Dingil eska Asé Tewodros (A History of Ethiopia from Libne Dingil to Tewodros II)*, (Addis Ababa, 1953 E.C.).

25. Tekle Sadik Mekuria, *Ya Ityopya Tarik: Nubia, Aksum, Zagwiye (A History of Ethiopia: Nubia, Aksum and the Zagwé)*, (Addis Ababa, 1951 E.C.).

26. Tekle Sadik Mekuria, *Ya Ityopya Tarik: Ka Asé Yekuno Amlak eska Asé Libne Dingil (A History of Ethiopia from Yekuno Amlak to Libne Dingil)*, (Addis Ababa, 1953).

27. G. M. Gasparini, *Ya Ityopya Tarik (History of Ethiopia)*, (Asmara, 1953).

28. Yilma Deressa, *A History of Ethiopia in the 16th Century*, (Addis Ababa, 1967) (Amharic).

29. F. Alvares, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 2 vols. (Hakluyt Society, London, 1961).

30. M. de Castanhoso, *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia in 1541–1543* trans. R.S. Whiteway, (Hakluyt Society, London, 1902).

31. *Histoire de la conquête de l'Abyssinie*, ed. and trans. by R. Basset, (Paris, 1897–1901).

32. See Book Review by Merid Weide Aregay in *Dialogue* 1 (1967), pp. 84–89.

part, although here again he has not used Ge'ez sources,³³ he attempts on the basis of oral tradition to describe the origin and the expansion of the Galla people in the highlands of Ethiopia.

B. External Development - European Contribution³⁴

Ethiopian Studies as a discipline was founded in Europe in the 17th century. The man who started this great task was Job Ludolf (1624–1704), a German, born in Frankfurt am Main. He was one of the first Europeans to write the history of Ethiopia in Latin.³⁵ His main sources were literary acquisitions which he was able to collect from different people, particularly from Abba Gregory, his Ethiopian teacher. The work shows how extensive his knowledge of Ethiopia was. It was translated immediately into English³⁶ and French.³⁷ Still today after two and a half centuries, it is useful for anyone who wants to study the history of Ethiopia.

About one hundred and fifty years later another important Ethiopist appeared again in Germany; this was August Dillmann who lived from 1823–1894. If Ludolf is the founder of Ethiopian Studies in general, Dillmann is the founder of scientific Ethiopian Studies in Europe. He published two serious studies on ancient Ethiopia in German.³⁸ Both these works are the result of long term and thorough studies of both primary and secondary sources in Ge'ez and other languages. The critical approach which he employed in writing qualifies him as an objective and authoritative historian.

After Dillmann, Ethiopian Studies were not limited to Germany alone, but also expanded to other countries. In France, R. Basset added a new contribution by translating a chronicle in a very masterly way and commenting on it according to other available sources.³⁹

A prominent French scholar who devoted himself to Ethiopian Studies, was Antoine d'Abbadie (1810–1898), who together with his brother Arnaud, spent many years in Ethiopia and succeeded in achieving enormous results in different fields of human knowledge. During his ten years' stay in Ethiopia, he worked mainly in the fields of history, geography, languages and natural sciences. The material which he collected in the above fields is accumulated in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century quite a number of books on Ethiopian history appeared. J. Morié published his work in two volumes.⁴⁰ The second volume deals with the history of our country. Morié was not primarily concerned with

33. Bahrey, *Geschichte der Galla*, ed. A. W. Schleicher, (Berlin, 1893); M. de Almeida, *Some Records of Ethiopia 1593–1646*, (Hakluyt Society, London, 1954), pp. 111–129; I. Guidi, *Historia gentis Galla in Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel*, ed. C. Conti Rossini, CSCO, Scr. Aeth. vol. III, pp. 223–231 (text), pp. 195–208 (version).

34. This topic has been widely covered previously by different writers: C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, (Bergamo, 1928), p. 10 ff; E. Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*, (London, 1960), p. 7 ff; Sergew H.S., *Beziehungen Aethiopiens zur Griechisch-Römischen Welt*, (Bonn, 1963), pp. 10–14.

35. Job Ludolf, *Historia Aethiopica*, (Frankfurt, 1681).

36. *A New History of Ethiopia*, (London, 1684).

37. *Nouvelle histoire d'Abissinie, ou d'Éthiopie*, (Paris, 1684).

38. "Ueber die Anfänge des Axumitischen Reiches": *Abhandlungen der Koeniglichen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, (Berlin, 1878); *Ibidem*, "Zur Geschichte des Axumitischen Reichs, im vierten bis sechsten Jahrhundert"; *ibid.*, (Berlin, 1880).

39. "Études sur l'histoire d'Éthiopie": *JA*, (1882).

40. *Histoire d'Éthiopie, Nubie et Abyssinie*, (Paris, 1904).

Ethiopian Studies; he was an Egyptologist. He did not utilize the Greek and other inscriptions when he was writing the history of Aksum. His knowledge about this country is second-hand and cannot be credited as reliable.

In 1926, A. Kammerer composed his book⁴¹ which still has value as a scientific work, although it contains some errors. This work is the first of its kind to deal extensively and exclusively with the ancient history of Ethiopia.

Two years later the "great historian," as many have called him, C. Conti Rossini (1872–1949) published his famous book.⁴² Before publishing his work, the author, studied continuously for twenty-five years the sources of Ethiopian history in Ge'ez, Sabaeen, Arabic and Greek. It is really the first systematic and detailed work on Ethiopia. But Conti Rossini published only the first volume, covering the period from early times to the end of the Zagwé Dynasty. It seems he intended to publish the second part with an Index to both volumes, but unfortunately he died in 1949 before completing his work.⁴³

In the same year, another book appeared by Sir E.A. Wallis Budge.⁴⁴ What he wrote about this country was drawn mainly from Ethiopian manuscripts in the British Museum. Although it gives a general picture of the country, it is not as profound and critical as it is sizeable.

The next history book to be published was the work of J.-B. Coulbeaux.⁴⁵ (The book was published by the Lazarist Mission of Addis Ababa eight years after his death). It is unfortunate that he did not revise this work objectively during his lifetime, for he was a man of sentiment and could not impartially record the affairs of another country.

From 1935 on, the interest of the world concentrated on Ethiopia. From the end of World War I, that is from 1918 until 1935, the world had been relatively tranquil. Unexpectedly the Italo-Ethiopian conflict began. After some time, real war broke out between the two rival governments. The world was eager to know about the country which had decided to resist the Italian invasion. Especially in Europe, interest was at a peak. At that time, if anyone wanted to sell a book, he simply had to advertise that the book dealt with Ethiopia.⁴⁶ For this reason, many who knew little about this country began to write about it. The literature on Ethiopia from this period is quite extensive, but lacking in quality. The best of these books was prepared by A. Jones and E. Monroe.⁴⁷ This book, although very short, is factual and can be recommended as a reference book. In contrast, the history published by Luca dei Sabelli⁴⁸ is a typical product of that time,

41. *Essai sur l'histoire antique d'Abyssinie*, (Paris, 1926).

42. *Storia d'Etiopia*, (Bergamo, 1928).

43. Index for this work published by E. Ullendorff, "Index of C. Conti Rossini's *Storia d'Etiopia*": *RSE*, 18 (1962).

44. *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia and Abyssinia*, 2 vols., (London, 1928).

45. *Histoire politique et religieuse de l'Abyssinie*, 2 vols., (Paris, 1929).

46. About this matter E. Waugh, who was war correspondent in Ethiopia during the Italian invasion, writes the following: "The journal of a woman traveller in Upper Egypt was advertised as giving information on the Abyssinian problem. Files were being searched for photographs of any inhospitable-looking people—Patagonian Indians, Borneo head-hunters, Australian aborigines—which could be reproduced to illustrate Abyssinian culture. Two English newspapers chose their special correspondents on the grounds that they had been born in South Africa. In the circumstances anyone who had actually spent a few weeks in Abyssinia itself, and had read the dozen or so books which constituted the entire English bibliography of the subject, might claim to be an expert..." *Waugh in Abyssinia*, (London, 1936), p. 49.

47. *A History of Abyssinia*, (London, 1935). Later it was published under the title, *A History of Ethiopia*.

48. *Storia di Abissinia*, 4 vols., (Roma, 1936–38).

In 1929, A. Kammerer published the first volume of a serious work.⁴⁹ He is the first scholar who tried to collect evidence and record objectively events which happened in the Red Sea area. His work, which covers the history of this area from very ancient times, ended with the 17th century. It consists of three volumes in seven parts.

J. Doresse, a French archaeologist who as the first member of the Section *archéologique d'Etiopie* conducted excavations in northern Ethiopia, Aksum and Yeha, published a general history of Ethiopia in 1956.⁵⁰ The part dealing with ancient history has originality since it incorporates the result of his excavations.

A year later the same author published a detailed book in two volumes.⁵¹ The first volume concentrated on ancient Ethiopian history, and the second on medieval history. Doresse used first-hand sources, especially those which had been discovered recently in northern Ethiopia. Although the work has a scientific character, one cannot say that it fills the gap sufficiently.

More recently, E. Ullendorff has published a book which differs in content from others.⁵² The work has not, however, the depth and new conceptions which one might expect from it. It is simply instructive for one who desires a general knowledge of Ethiopia.

The same author has produced another work⁵³ which deals with some aspects of Jewish influences on the religious life of Ethiopia and literary problems of the Ethiopian Biblical version. In the former case, the author has shown his own positive stand; whereas in the latter, he has limited himself to mentioning the views of various European scholars. Ironically enough, the Ethiopian view is not represented.

Another scholar, who has dealt with source material of ancient Ethiopian history seriously, is A.J. Drewes. He spent a year on research and studied the newly found source materials in Northern Ethiopia and published his book in the form of a dissertation.⁵⁴ This book is divided into two sections; the first in which the author discusses so far unknown Ge'ez inscriptions with linguistic and historical commentary; in the second, he discusses the ancient history of Ethiopia, throwing new light on it. His comments and attempts to reconstruct Ethiopian history depending on new source material, prove his ability and the depth of his thought.

C. The Development of Archaeology in Ethiopia

The history of Ethiopian archaeology is not as old as one might expect. In the dawn of the last century, Henry Salt,⁵⁵ on his visit to Ethiopia, paid appropriate attention and copied inscriptions. The first man who did serious research in archaeology was Theodore Bent. During his four-month stay in Ethiopia, he visited the ancient cities of Aksum, Adulis, Yeha and Coloe (Cohaito) where Sabaeen, Ge'ez and Greek inscriptions, as well as other historical relics, can be found. The inscriptions were translated and commented

49. *La Mer Rouge, l'Abyssinie et l'Arabie depuis l'antiquité*, 3 vols., (Cairo, 1929–1952).

50. *Au pays de la Reine de Saba, l'Etiopie antique et moderne*, (Paris, 1956). The work was translated into English under the title, *Ethiopia*, (London, 1959).

51. *L'Empire du Prêtre Jean*, 2 vols., (Paris, 1957).

52. *The Ethiopians*, (London, 1960).

53. *Ethiopia and the Bible*, (London, 1968).

54. *Inscriptions de l'Etiopie antique*, (Leiden, 1962).

55. *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, (London, 1814), p. 404 ff. But F. Anfray would like to push the date as far as the 16th century. "Où en est notre connaissance du passé d'Etiopie?": *Tarik* 1 (1963).

upon by D. Müller, a specialist from Vienna University. Bent incorporated this information into his book.⁵⁶

In the year 1906, the German Kaiser, Wilhelm II, who had an ardent desire to collect antiquities, sent an archaeological mission to Ethiopia under the leadership of E. Littmann. After three months of extensive work here, the mission returned to Germany. Following six years of preparation, the members of this mission published the most significant work yet written.⁵⁷ It is unique of its kind. It contains every kind of material pertaining to Ethiopian culture: architecture, art, language, history and so on. It is the mirror of ancient Ethiopian culture. The only difficulty which the reader faces is perhaps the problem of the language, for it is written in German which is a language little-known around the world. It was written in four volumes, the first containing information on travel, topography and the history of Aksum. The second deals with ancient architecture, and the third with the material and building methods employed in Ethiopia in ancient and modern times. The last volume contains Sabaeen, Ge'ez, and Greek inscriptions with translations and comments. Most of the inscriptions which are in this book cannot be found today and this actually increases the value of the work.

One year after the German Expedition, the Italian government ordered an excavation to be made in the old port city of Adulis to find the famous monument of Adulis. Of course, they did not find it; however, many other articles and objects were found which are important for the history of the city and for the country at large. For example, they discovered quite a number of coins, foundations of houses, different types of pottery, etc. The entire research and discoveries are discussed by Gallina-Paribeni.⁵⁸ For the period of more than half a century during which the Italians were settled in Eritrea, this is the first and the last serious archaeological expedition, because the Italians prohibited excavations in the occupied zone of Ethiopia.⁵⁹ This situation did not change during the British administration of the area.

Two French monks, F. Azaïs and R. Chambard, came to Ethiopia to study its pre-history in the eastern and southern parts of the country on a subsidy granted by the French government. The result of their expedition was published in two volumes.⁶⁰ It is the first of its kind and useful as a means of enriching our knowledge about Ethiopia's pre-history.

Except for these occasional archaeological expeditions, until the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, there was not a single institute in the whole empire of Ethiopia dealing with archaeology. Finally, the Ethiopian government felt the necessity for establishing a service of antiquities. In 1952, an agreement was made with the French government to create an Archaeological Institute, with the aim of developing and improving the knowledge of the antiquities of this country. According to the agreement, the French government was to supply two experts, paying all their expenses, and the Ethiopian government on its part, had an obligation to construct the building and be responsible for scientific equipment and administration. The agreement was signed by the two governments and the Institute came into existence. Since that time, the Ethiopian Institute of

56. *The Sacred City of the Ethiopians*, (London, 1896), pp. 231-285.

57. *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, 4 vols., (Berlin, 1913).

58. *Ricerche nel luogo dell'antica Adulis*, (Roma, 1908).

59. "No excavation was ever allowed by the Italian government elsewhere than at Adoulis", D.J. Duncan, "Giramat: A New Archaeological Site in Eritrea": *Antiquity* 21 (1947), p. 158.

60. *Cinq années de recherches archéologiques en Éthiopie*, (Paris, 1931).

Archaeology has been dealing with excavations and study. So far a number of pre-historic and historic sites in Ethiopia have been excavated. The results of these excavations are recorded in *Annales d'Éthiopie*, the first scientific journal in Ethiopia.⁶¹

Ten years later in 1962, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies came into existence when the Haile Selassie I University was founded. The main fields of study of this Institute are literature, art and history. In a way, it is the national depository of Ethiopia. Since 1963 it has had its own biannual organ, *The Journal of Ethiopian Studies*.

II. Sources of Ethiopian History

Thanks to written language, Ethiopian history is well-documented. On the basis of their quality, it would be better to divide the sources into first-and/or second-hand information, the former including all authentic sources and the latter dealing with information from secondary sources.

A. Primary sources

1. Inscriptions
2. Coins
3. Letters and Decrees
4. Monuments

B. Secondary sources

1. Greek Writers
2. Latin Writers
3. Arab Writers
4. Ethiopian Manuscripts

A. Primary sources

a) *Inscriptions*: We have inscriptions in four different languages: Sabaeen, Greek, Ge'ez and Arabic. Sabaeen was introduced by the South Arabians and was spoken in northern Ethiopia for at least 1,000 years, from the 6th century B.C. to the 4th century A.D.⁶² During this period, Sabaeen was used as the literary language of Ethiopia and many inscriptions were produced in it. Some of these inscriptions were published and commented upon by E. Littmann.⁶³ Most of these published inscriptions are of a religious character. Recently, through the founding of the Ethiopian Institute of Archaeology, many Sabaeen inscriptions, whose content is also mainly religious, have been brought to light.⁶⁴ But those found in South Arabia which relate to the Ethiopian occupation there deal, by and large, with political history.⁶⁵ Since the excavations in Ethiopia have been carried out only on a limited scale, many inscriptions have presumably still not been unearthed and also many engraved monuments and objects not carefully copied.

61. *Annales d'Éthiopie* was first published in 1955 and was intended to be an annual publication. But for various reasons it was not possible to realise that aim and at the time of writing (1972) only eight volumes have appeared.

62. This is in continental Ethiopia. But if we take into account the period of Ethiopian occupation in South Arabia in the 6th century A.D., Sabaeen was still used there as a literary language by Ethiopians.

63. E. Littmann, *Sabäische, griechische und altäthiopische Inschriften: Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, (Berlin, 1913), Vol. IV, p. 57 ff; *Ibidem*, "Aethiopische Inschriften": *Miscellanea Academica Berolinensia*, 2pt. 2 (1950).

64. A. Caquot and A.J. Drewes, "Les monuments recueillis à Maqallé (Tigré)": *AE* 1 (1955) pp. 17-41; A.J. Drewes, "Les Inscriptions de Melazo": *AE* 3 (1959), pp. 83-99; R. Schneider, "Inscriptions d'Enda Cerqos": *AE* 4 (1961), pp. 61-65; *Ibidem*, "Notes épigraphiques sur les découvertes de Matara": *AE* 6 (1965) pp. 89-92.

65. E. Glaser, *Die Abessinier in Arabien und Afrika*, (München, 1895), p. 28 ff; W. Caskel, "Entdeckungen in Arabien" (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen Geisteswissenschaften H. 30), (Köln u. Opladen 1954); C. Conti Rossini, *Storia*, p. 179 ff; A. Jamme, *Sabaeen Inscriptions from Mahram Bilqis (Mārib)*, (Baltimore, 1962), p. 64 ff; *Ibidem*, *Sabaeen and Hasaeen Inscriptions from Saudi Arabia*, (Rome, 1966).

The dates of the excavated Sabaeen inscriptions vary from 500 B.C. to the first quarter of the 4th century A.D. in the case of continental Ethiopia, i.e., ending with the trilingual inscription of Ezana.

At the beginning of this century many Greek inscriptions were discovered in northern Ethiopia by E. Littmann and other European travellers. The ages of these inscriptions vary from the first century B.C. to the 4th century A.D.⁶⁵ The content is purely historical, thereby shedding new light on the history of Ethiopia; and through these inscriptions we are able to fill in some of the gaps in the Aksumite period. In this context, the inscription of the King of Kings Sembruthes, which was discovered in Deqe Mehari (north of Asmara) should be mentioned as an example. This inscription is very important from the point of view of the constitutional, cultural and historical development of Ethiopia at that time. It is strange that, although excavations have been continued in a more systematic way since the beginning of the second half of this century, more Greek inscriptions have not yet been discovered. The main reason for this may be because the excavations have been concentrated in the main Sabaeen centres such as Yeha, Melazo and Hawlti.⁶⁷

Because of the lack of adequate documentation, we do not know exactly when the Ge'ez language became an independent language from the Sabaeen.⁶⁸ Until recent times the inscription of Matara of the 3rd century was believed to be the oldest Ge'ez inscription in Ethiopia.⁶⁹ But now, because of the discovery of other Ge'ez inscriptions in different regions of Tigré and Eritrea, the date of the use of the Ge'ez language in Ethiopia has been pushed back.⁷⁰ The discovery of these inscriptions has tremendous significance for Ethiopia from many points of view. In the first place, more light is shed on the literary development of the country. Furthermore, since the content is mainly historical, it enriches the history of Ethiopia. In this way, some obscure aspects of ancient Ethiopian history can be clarified and new historical events are revealed. In other words, from these inscriptions we get authentic information about the political, social, constitutional, economic and religious situation in Ethiopia during the Aksumite period. Most of these inscriptions have been published in different periodicals and annals and a few of them also in book form.⁷¹

The introduction of the Arabic language into Ethiopia was gradual in the coastal area of the country, following the spread of Islam itself. The Moslem population of that area used it as a medium of instruction and thereby recorded some events of their lives.⁷²

66. E. Littmann, *Sabaeische*, p. 1 ff.

67. J. Leclant, "Haoulti-Melazo (1955-1956)": *AE* 3 (1959), pp. 43-57; H. de Contenson, "Les fouilles à Haoulti-Melazo": *AE* 4 (1961), p. 39 ff; *ibid.*, 5 (1963), p. 44 ff; F. Anfray, "Une campagne de fouilles à Yeha (Février-Mars 1960)": *AE* 5 (1963), p. 171 ff.

68. A.J. Drewes, *Inscriptions*, p. 99 ff; *Ibidem*, "Problèmes de paléographie éthiopienne": *AE* 1 (1955), pp. 121-126; *Ibidem*, "Nouvelles inscriptions de l'Éthiopie": *Bi. Or.* 13 (1956), pp. 179-182; *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, Vol. IV, p. 76 ff.

69. *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, Vol. IV, p. 61; Conti Rossini, "L'iscrizione dell' obelisco presso Matara": *RRAL* Serie 5, Vol. 5, (1896), pp. 250-253; E. Ullendorff, *Exploration and Study of Abyssinia*, (Asmara, 1945), p. 75 ff; *Ibidem*, "The Obelisk of Matara": *JRAS* 1951.

70. J. Doresse, *L'Empire*, p. 82; A. Caquot and A.J. Drewes, "Les monuments", p. 38; A.J. Drewes, *Inscriptions*, p. 101 ff; L. Ricci, "Iscrizioni rupestri dell'Eritrea": *RSE* 15 (1959), pp. 55-95; *ibid.*, 16 (1960), pp. 76-126; A.J. Drewes and R. Schneider, "Documents épigraphiques de l'Éthiopie": *AE* 7 (1967).

71. Here is worth mentioning the work of A.J. Drewes, *Inscriptions*, *op. cit.*

72. E. Cerulli, "Il Sultanato dello Scioa nel secolo XIII, secondo un nuovo documento storico": *RSE* 1, (1941); *Ibidem*, "Documenti arabi per la storia dell' Etiopia": *MRRAL* Serie 6, Vol. 4, (1931).

The Arabic inscriptions so far discovered are funeral epigrams, with historical significance.⁷³

b) *Coins*: Ethiopia is one of the few empires of the world that had its own coins in ancient times. The minting of coins in Ethiopia occurred as far back as the third century A.D. and continued up to the 10th century A.D. at least. Although Sabaeen coins existed before the mintage of Aksumite ones, the pattern was taken from the Graeco-Roman world and more precisely from the coins of Diocletian. The legend was first written in Greek and later in Ge'ez. (So far we have not found any Aksumite coins bearing a legend in Sabaeen). Coins in Aksum were minted mainly from gold, silver, iron and bronze. The kind of metal defined the value of the coins. The size of the Aksumite coins differed from one period to another, the oldest being very small with the effigy of the Emperor on both sides, in obverse bearing the crown and on the reverse, without. Until the introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia, the coins bore pagan symbols, the crescent and disc; but after the introduction of Christianity, they bore the Christian symbol, the cross.⁷⁴ The coins of Ethiopia in general are an invaluable source giving us accurate information on the history, art and religion of the Aksumite Empire. The legend on both sides consisted of the name of the king, his tribe, and sometimes a motto in which he stated his policy briefly.⁷⁵ The effigy of the king, the religious symbols and the shape of the coins are an outstanding testimony to the development of Ethiopian art. At the same time the religious symbols are evidence of the official religion practised at different periods in the empire: paganism and Christianity. The minting of coins at Aksum also shows the tremendous importance it had for the economy of the country. If we recall that these coins were minted for the purposes of external trade, we can better imagine the state of Aksumite trade.

c) *Letters and Decrees*: Of these we have very little material because of the lack of intensive research. There is no doubt that since the inhabitants had friendly relations with the South Arabians and the people of the Mediterranean world, they corresponded with them. However, only a small part of this correspondence is known to us. The main reason for this is that the Aksumite archives suffered from destructive invasions many times; likewise, those letters dispatched from Ethiopia evidently fared no better or have been lost for lack of attention. In the early Byzantine era, Aksumite emperors received and sent many letters, but the only authentic letter which is preserved up to the present day is the letter of Constantius⁷⁶ to Ezana and Saizana, and the decree of the same emperor which was issued for travellers going to the country of the Aksumites and the Himyarites.⁷⁷ In the 6th century, the Byzantine writers attributed letters sent from the Byzantine emperors and Patriarchs of Alexandria to Ethiopian emperors but the authenticity of these letters has not yet been proven. The same was done in the 7th century by Arab writers.

73. C. Pansera, "Quattro stele musulmane presso Uogher Haribà nell' Enderta": *Studi Etiopici raccolti da C. Conti Rossini*, (Rome, 1945), pp. 3-6; E. Rossi, "Iscrizioni funerarie arabe musulmane del paese degli Arussi": *RSE* 2 (1942), pp. 277-281.

74. The main works on Ethiopian coins are: C. Conti Rossini, "Monete Aksumite": *Africa Italiana* 1 (1927); A. Anzani, "Numismatica Axumita": *Rivista Italiana di Numismatica*, Serie III, 3 (1926); *Ibidem*, "Numismatica e storia d' Etiopia," *Rivista Italiana di Numismatica*, Serie III, 5 and 6 (1928-1929); *Ibidem*, "Le monete dei Re di Axum, Studi supplementari": *ibid.*, serie IV, 1 (1941).

75. A. Mordini, "Appunti di numismatica Aksumita": *AE* 3 (1959), pp. 179-183; R. Pankhurst, *An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia*, (London, 1963), Appendix B, pp. 402-405; *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, Vol. I, pp. 46-57.

76. Athanasius, *Apologia ad Constantium*, ed. Szymusiak, (Paris, 1958). For the English translation of the text see S. Pankhurst, *Ethiopia A Cultural History*, (London, 1956), pp. 58-59.

77. *Codex Theodosianus* XII, 12, 2, ed. Th. Mommsen, (Berlin, 1905).

They included the correspondence of Ethiopian emperors with Moslem leaders, particularly with Mohammed.⁷⁸ But internal and external evidence proving their authenticity has not yet been found. In this context, the correspondence of the Ethiopian emperors with the Patriarchs of Alexandria and the Califs and Sultans of Egypt cannot be considered in the same light. They are more or less authentic and the only thing needed is to make the effort to collect and publish them. Likewise, the letter of an unknown king of Ethiopia to George of Nubia should be considered authentic.

d) *Monuments*: Under this heading we include the stelae of Aksum, ruined palaces, temples, churches, private houses, statues, altars and pottery. The stelae of Aksum are oblong monolithic monuments of different sizes. The biggest measures 33 metres and is found today in a fragmented condition at its original place in Aksum. It is a multi-storied monument with imitation doors and windows. The purpose of its erection is not known exactly and there is no explanatory inscription on it whatsoever. It is a masterpiece of architectural genius, however, and reveals a high standard of civilization.

In Aksum, to the north of the town, we have the ruins of a palace which is commonly known as the tomb of Caleb and Gebre Meskal.⁷⁹ Most probably, this is the place mentioned by the Greek diplomat, Nonnosus, who visited the Aksumite court in the first half of the 6th century. The experts believe it is two distinct buildings of identical architectural style.⁸⁰ In the excavations carried out by the Ethiopian Institute of Archaeology in the south-western part of Aksum, a complex of buildings which is believed to be a palace, was uncovered.⁸¹ There are other palaces in and around Aksum which were discovered by a German expedition.⁸²

Ruined temples were discovered in the excavations of different sites in northern Ethiopia. H. de Contenson discovered the temple of the god Almouqah in Hawlti-Melazo in 1959.⁸³ The German expedition to Aksum in 1906 discovered the remains of the old temple of Ares on the hill of *Abba* Penteleon, about 5 km. east of Aksum.⁸⁴ The temple, which still is found in good condition, is the temple of Yeha which belongs to the 6th century B.C.⁸⁵ From the architectural point of view, it is one of the masterpieces of art, and I think it is necessary to emphasize the fact that this monument is the oldest in existence in Ethiopia, and its preservation is essential.

The foundations of many churches were found at various sites by the German Expedition to Ethiopia and by recent excavations of the Ethiopian Institute of Archaeology.⁸⁶ The Debre Damo Monastery church is the oldest existing church in Ethiopia. According to legendary sources, the church was built by Emperor Gebre Meskal in the second half of the 6th century A.D. Although this church has been recently restored, its old character

78. E.A.W. Budge, *A History of Ethiopia*, (Oesterhant N.B., 1966), Vol. I, p. 271 ff.; Tabari, *Chronique*, trans. M.H. Zotenberg, (Paris, 1958), Vol. III, pp. 93-97.

79. *DAE*, Vol. II, p. 127 ff.

80. *DAE*, Vol. II, p. 127.

81. *Ethiopian Herald*, July 2, 1967, Vol. VI, No. 763; *Addis Soir*, (5 Juillet, 1967).

82. *DAE*, Vol. II, pp. 110-124.

83. *DAE*, Vol. II, p. 90 ff.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 78 ff.; Th. Bent, *The Sacred City of the Ethiopians*, (London, 1896), p. 134 ff.

85. H. de Contenson, "Les fouilles de Haoulti en 1959, rapport préliminaire": *AE* 5 (1963), p. 41.

86. *DAE*, Vol. II, p. 144 ff.; H. de Contenson, "Les fouilles à Haoulti - Melazo en 1958": *AE* 4 (1961), p. 40 ff.; C. Conti Rossini, "Necropoli musulmana ed antica chiesa cristiana presso Uogri Haribà nel Enderta": *RSO* 17 (1938), pp. 399-408.

and features have been preserved.⁸⁷ In this context, the monolithic churches of Lalibela should be mentioned; they are described by Alvares who says: "the like of which and so many cannot, as it appears to me, be found in the world".⁸⁸ There are still many other churches which are today unknown to the scholarly world. Thanks to the attempts of some Ethiopians and foreigners, however, some of them have been revealed.

The architectural development of Ethiopian private houses was studied by the German Expedition to Ethiopia at the beginning of this century and the excavations of Paribeni at Adulis brought to light the type of old houses used in the main port of Ethiopia.⁸⁹ Recently at Matara, and to a certain extent also at Aksum, buildings have been discovered which throw light on the private lives of Ethiopians in ancient times.⁹⁰ A thorough study of this field is essential for the economic and social history of Ethiopia in ancient times.

One important source of Ethiopian history is found in the statues of different gods and personalities. From one of the inscriptions of Ezana we learn that on one occasion the monarch erected three statues in bronze, one in silver and one in gold.⁹¹ None of these exists today. At a later date, Cosmas Indicopleustes speaks about a big garden of the Imperial palace which had metal statues here and there, but these too have disappeared.⁹² The Ethiopian Institute of Archaeology discovered different sized statues in Hawlti-Melazo and other places. These statues belonged to high ranking persons of the Aksumite period, if not earlier.⁹³ The fact in this case is that the Ethiopians used to erect statues to gods and people as well as for decorative purposes.

The pottery of Ethiopia can be divided into two groups; that imported from outside and home-made pottery. The latter can be identified as belonging to different ages in Ethiopian history and to a certain extent it helps the historian to fill in the gaps or reconstruct living conditions during a specific period.

B. Secondary Sources

a) *Greek Writers*: Ethiopia appears in Greek literature from the time of Homer. In his epics, Ethiopia is mentioned five times in the geographical and ethnographical sense.⁹⁴ Later most of the classical writers dedicated many pages to Ethiopia; Herodotus, particularly, gives more detailed information on Ethiopia. He received his information from priests and merchants who had close ties with the country, but it cannot be said that the information is always correct and accurate. On the whole, the material on Ethiopia that accumulated in classical Greek literature is very general and vague. Never-

87. D.H. Matthews, "The Restoration of the Monastery Church of Debra Damo, Ethiopia": *Antiquity* 92 (1949), pp. 188-200; D.E. Buxton, "The Christian Antiquities of Northern Ethiopia": *Archaeologia* 92 (1947), pp. 6-13; D. H. Matthews and A. Mordini, "The Monastery of Debre Damo, Ethiopia": *Archaeologia* 97 (1959).

88. E. Alvares, *The Prester John of the Indies*, ed. C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford, (Hakluyt Society, London 1961), Vol. I, p. 100.

89. *DAE*, Vol. III; R. Paribeni, *Ricerche nel luogo dell'antica Adulis*, (Roma, 1908).

90. F. Anfray, "La première campagne de fouilles à Matara près de Sénafé": *AE* 5 (1963) p. 87 ff.

91. *DAE*, Vol. IV, p. 4, (text).

92. J. W. McCrindle, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk* (Hakluyt Society, London, 1897), pp. 360-361; E.O. Winstedt, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes*, (Cambridge, 1909), p. 319.

93. H. de Contenson, "Les monuments d'art Sud-Arabe découverts sur le site de Haoulti (Éthiopie) en 1959": *Syria* 39 (1962), pp. 64-87.

94. *Iliad*, A 423, psi 205; *Od.*, A 22, D 83, E 282.

theless, the concepts and the ideas which the Greek authors had about Ethiopia are worthy of study.

During the Hellenistic period, the country became more widely known because of the improvement in communications and the sustained development of commercial relations. Therefore, during that period geographical and historical information became clearer than before. Particularly from the time of the Ptolemies, we have more concrete information from papyri and inscriptions. But these materials are very rare and the few in existence have not been studied properly. However, sometimes individual travellers, like the author of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*,⁹⁵ give us accurate information about the Aksumite Empire and of the commercial activities in the Red Sea Basin. In the Medieval period the Byzantine writers dealt with Ethiopian history; but in most of their works they only repeated what had already been written, or they gave the experiences of eye-witnesses in exaggerated form. However, Cosmas Indicopleustes,⁹⁶ who spent some time in the Aksumite Empire as a merchant and later as a Christian writer, cannot be classified in this group. His book includes political, commercial, and literary information on Ethiopia in the first half of the 6th century. In a way, the same can be said about another contemporary writer, Procopius, who was court chronicler of Justinian. Although he never visited Ethiopia, the historical accounts of Ethiopia in this writer's book are generally correct.

Accounts of some Byzantine writers who visited Ethiopia for personal or official reasons no longer exist. For example during the reign of Justinian a professional diplomat called Nonnosus was sent as an envoy from the Byzantine Empire to the Aksumite court. After returning home he produced an account of his mission to Aksum but unfortunately, the work does not exist today and we have only a summary of it in the collection of Photius, *Myriobyblos*.⁹⁷ At the same time another diplomat, a certain Julian, visited Aksum as a special envoy of Justinian. He also wrote of his mission but what he wrote has disappeared. About the success of this mission we hear from other writers.⁹⁸

We are not quite clear as to whether the Byzantine Empire had direct contact with Ethiopia after the 6th century. If it did, any such contact must have been rare or indirect because of the expansion of Islam in the Middle East from the 7th century A.D. At any rate, I think it is premature to say anything definite without systematic research on Byzantine archives.

b) *Latin Writers*: These authors followed the same pattern as the Greek writers, the only difference being that the material which we have in Latin literature is relatively scant and the period spanned is also shorter. From Latin sources we have relatively adequate material on Ethiopia in Imperial times, however. During this period, since the Middle East came under the control of the Roman legions, the contact between Rome and Aksum was more or less direct and mainly commercial. In this respect we have authen-

95. B. Fabricius, *Der Periplus des Erythraischen Meeres*, (Leipzig, 1883); W. Schoff, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, (London, 1912); H. Frisk, *Le Périple de la mer Erythrée*, (Göteborg, 1927); About the date of the book, see Sergew Hable-Selassie, *op. cit.*, p. 32, n. 118; J.A.B. Palmer, "Periplus Maris Erythraei: The Indian Evidence as to the Date", *The Classical Quarterly*, 41 (1947), pp. 136-140; J. Pirenne, "La date du 'Périple de la Mer Erythrée'", *JA* (1961), pp. 167-173. The new approach to this problem was recently discussed some years back by G. Matthew at the conference of "Africa and Orient" under the title, "The Dating and the Significance of Periplus of the Erythraean Sea" (mimeographed).
96. J.W. McCrindle, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas*, pp. 360-361; E.O. Winstedt, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes*, p. 319.
97. Photius, *The Library of Photius*, trans. J.H. Freese, (London 1920); *Fragm. Hist. Graec.*, ed. C. Mueller, Vol. IV, (1851).
98. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, ed. H.B. Dewing, (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1961), Vol. I, p. 192, (text).

tic information from the book of Pliny, in which mention is made of the main port, the commodities of Ethiopia and the reaction of the Roman Senate to Ethiopia's exports.⁹⁹ Where the political relations of the two empires are concerned, however, I think the Latin writers were less realistic. Even Seneca, who was the tutor and advisor of Nero, does not reveal the real intention of Roman policy towards Ethiopia.¹⁰⁰ In later times also, the attitude of Vopiscus, the author of *Historia Augusta*, was no different. He exaggerated the exploits of Aurelian and presented the Aksumites as prisoners,¹⁰¹ which in reality was not true.

In the 4th century, after the introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia, some Christian Latin writers dealt with that particular problem. Rufinus, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, describes the introduction of Christianity for the first time, but in a very vague way¹⁰² which was repeated by other Byzantine writers.¹⁰³ Hieronymos mentions the presence of Ethiopian Christians in Jerusalem in his letters.¹⁰⁴ However, I do not know of any Latin writers referring to Ethiopia in their work after the 4th century, though there may be rare cases.

c) *Arab Writers*: The rise of Islam begins with the immigration of followers of this new religion into Ethiopia.¹⁰⁵ Most probably, this event inaugurated a new era of friendly and close contact between the Moslem Arab world and Christian Ethiopia. At the same time, many literary works were produced around this event with little accuracy. Arab writers of this particular period include in their works letters which, they claim, were exchanged between Mohammad and the Ethiopian monarch;¹⁰⁶ however, their authenticity is dubious. Nevertheless, since the Dark Ages started in Ethiopia some years after the expansion of Islam, the Arab writers as such became an indispensable source of Ethiopian history. In other words, when the Dark Ages enveloped Ethiopia in the 9th and 10th centuries, Arab writers continued to provide information on Ethiopia. Of course when we say Arab writers, we mean both Christians and Moslems. No one has yet attempted to collect the historical information on Ethiopia in a systematic way. Sustained research in this field will fill some of the *lacuna* in Ethiopian history.

d) *Ethiopian Manuscripts*: From the point of view of quantity Ethiopia possesses a tremendous number of manuscripts. This is because of the late introduction of the printing press to the country at the beginning of the 20th century. Up to that time, all books were written by hand. There was a special school for calligraphy in Begémdir where people received appropriate training in this art and in Shewa, in central Ethiopia, there was a school for book binding where people were trained in this technique. Once trained, they were employed in the royal court recording the events which happened there daily, or they started their own private enterprises copying religious books and selling them. The writing materials, i.e., parchment from goat skin, ink—both black and red—from

99. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, ed. Jones-Rackham, (1938), Vol. VIII, p. 64.
100. Seneca, *Quaestiones Naturalis*, ed. Oltramare, (1929), IV, 2, 4; VI, 8, 3; see also the article by W. Schur, "Die Orientpolitik des Kaisers Nero", *Klio* 25, (1923).
101. *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, ed. Hohl, vit. Aur. 33, 4, Vol. II (1927); Conti Rossini, *Storia*, p. 124; Sergew Hable Selassie, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
102. Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. Bidez-Hansen, 1960; English translation of the Latin text, A. Jones and E. Monroe, *A History of Ethiopia*, (London, 1955), pp. 26-27.
103. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. LXII col. 125 ff; Vol. LXIX col. 996 ff; Vol. LXXXII col. 969 ff; Vol. LXV col. 485.
104. E. Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina: Storia della comunità etiopica di Gerusalemme*, (Roma, 1943), Vol. I, pp. 1-2.
105. J.S. Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, (Oxford, 1952), p. 44 ff; L. Caetani, *Annali dell'Islam*, (Milano, 1905), Vol. I, p. 736 ff; Vol. II, p. 52.
106. W. Budge, *History of Ethiopia*, Vol. I, p. 271 ff.

different plants and minerals, and pens from reeds, they prepared themselves. Paper first began to be imported and used in Ethiopia in the 19th century. So, except for a very few manuscripts from the 19th and 20th centuries, the rest were written on parchment.

The exact age that Ethiopian manuscripts date back to is not yet known. The oldest known manuscript belongs to the 13th century. This of course, does not mean that before that century Ethiopian manuscripts were non-existent. I think Ethiopian manuscripts are as old as the script itself. Why then, do we not have manuscripts older than the 13th century? First of all, there has been no tentative study made yet of Ethiopian manuscripts; we do not have an inventory of them.¹⁰⁷ Secondly, the climatic and political conditions of the country must also be considered. The climate in Ethiopia, particularly on the high plateau where culture flourished, is very wet, which makes the preservation of manuscripts for a long period impossible. Moreover, the history of Ethiopia in the Middle Ages is more or less a history of war. During this period the cultural heritage of the past suffered much and many manuscripts disappeared. In this connection Ethiopian history has recorded two destructive periods: the persecution of Christians and destruction of monuments and churches of the north by Gudit, an Amazon of Ethiopia, in the 10th century; and the invasion of Ahmed Gagn, who was characterized by European writers as the Attila of Ethiopia, in the 16th century. This invasion dealt a severe blow to Ethiopian culture in general.

Another invaluable service (quite apart from the historical and literary value) which the historian obtains from manuscripts, is with respect to the history of art. Most manuscripts in Ethiopia are decorated with different designs and are sometimes illustrated with paintings. This greatly helps the study of the development of Ethiopian art throughout the centuries. The various calligraphic styles in different centuries represent in themselves an essential part of art. In this respect, I think the Ethiopian manuscripts contribute something original to the civilization of the country.

Finally, mention should be made of the fact that the church was the only archive of the Empire. Such official documents as imperial letters, decrees, decisions, etc., were recorded in the margins of manuscripts and many documents of tremendous historical importance were saved and preserved.

III. Prehistory of Ethiopia

The prehistory of Ethiopia has not yet been appropriately placed. This is why J.D. Clark, in his recent prehistorical map of Africa, includes Ethiopia in the region where little investigation has been carried out.¹⁰⁸ In the last few years, however, a number of scholars have started to pay attention to this field. H. Breuil studied the prehistorical sites of Harrar and its surroundings.¹⁰⁹ J.D. Clark, after serious and long study, produced a work on the prehistoric cultures of the Horn of Africa.¹¹⁰ The same scholar studied the Stone Age sites of Yavello in southern Ethiopia and published a preliminary note.¹¹¹ G. Bailloud of the *Musée de l'Homme*, Paris, who had a chance to make a close and exten-

107. In 1964-65 I had the opportunity to visit some churches in Shewa, Gojjam and parts of Tigre and to register some books.

108. *Atlas of African Prehistory*, (Chicago, 1967), p. 21.

109. "Peintures rupestres préhistoriques du Harrar": *L'Anthropologie*, (1951).

110. *The Prehistoric Cultures of the Horn of Africa*, (Cambridge, 1954). The work of S. Cole, *The Prehistory of East Africa*, (Penguin Books, 1954), deals also partly with Ethiopia.

111. "Short notes on Stone Age Site at Yavello, Southern Abyssinia": *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*, Vol. XXXI, part I, pp. 29-37.

sive study of the prehistoric sites of Harrar and Melka Kontoure, has published many studies.¹¹²

Another French prehistorian, J. Chavaillon, has begun recently to excavate in Melka Kontoure and I presume this work is the first of its kind.¹¹³ In 1967 a promising investigation started at the Omo River under the supervision of Professor C. Arambourg and the discovery of *para-australopithecus Aethiopicus* was made. According to the information obtained from scholars who devoted their time to this work, this discovery is believed to be a major achievement in the history of African prehistory as a whole.

So far the major work has been accomplished in the eastern and southern parts of Ethiopia. An officer of the British Military Mission to Ethiopia in 1941 investigated the prehistoric sites at Gorgora and sent specimens to Professor Leakey in Kenya. The latter published the result of his studies.¹¹⁴ The Italians dealt with the prehistory of Eritrea.¹¹⁵ No excavations have been yet conducted in this region and all studies are based on surface work.

From the previous studies, the age of the Ethiopian prehistory was believed to vary from 50,000 to 60,000 years. With the excavations on the sites of Melka Kontoure it has been pushed back to 500,000 years and now with the discovery of *para-australopithecus Aethiopicus* it has reached 1,500,000 years.¹¹⁶ So, at present the prehistory of Ethiopia covers a period of time expanded from the Early Stone Age up to Neolithic and Proto-Historic.¹¹⁷

112. "La Préhistoire de l'Éthiopie avec bibliographie": *Cahiers de l'Afrique et l'Asie*, (1959); *Ibidem*, "La préhistoire de l'Éthiopie": *Tarikh* 2 (1963); *Ibidem*, "Les Gisements paléolithiques de Melka Kontouré, Choa": *Cahiers de l'Institut Éthiopien d'Archéologie* 1, (Addis Ababa, 1965).

113. He has published a preliminary study, "La préhistoire éthiopienne à Melka Kontouré": *Archeologia*, No. 19, (1967).

114. "The Industries of the Gorgora Rock Shelter, Lake Tana": *Journal of the East Africa and Uganda National History Society*, XVII, No. 374 (77 & 78), (1943).

115. G. Dainelli and O. Morinelli, *Risultati scientifici di un viaggio nella colonia Eritrea*, (Florence, 1912); A. Mordini, "Un riparo sotto roccia con pitture rupestri nell'Ambà Focadà": *RSE* 1 (1941), pp. 54-60; P. Graziosi, "Le pitture rupestri dell'Amba Focadà (Eritrea)": *RSE* 1, (1941); *Ibidem*, "Figure rupestri schematiche dell'Acchele Guzai (Etiopia)": *Atti de VI Congresso Internazionale delle scienze preistoriche e proto storiche*, (Roma, 1962); *Ibidem*, "New Discoveries of Rock Paintings in Ethiopia": *Antiquity* 38 (1964).

116. J. Chavaillon, *La préhistoire*, p. 57.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

CHAPTER I

ETHIOPIA AND THE CIVILIZED WORLD

1. Ethiopia and Egypt

In historic times, the sources which provide us with information about Ethiopia (indirectly at least) are the monuments of Egypt. In the hieroglyphics of the tombs of some Pharaohs we find phrases and sometimes the entire text speaking about the countries which are south of Egypt. Monuments of Egypt also preserve a picture of the people, fauna and flora of this region. These are invaluable sources for our knowledge of these countries.

For this area, Egyptian sources give us different names, the oldest and the most frequently used being "Punt". It appears for the first time in the texts of Egypt from the IV Dynasty. This name was used loosely and vaguely, and did not define a specific area with clearly marked boundaries. In connection with the extent of this country, E. Naville believes that "it must have begun near Suakim or Massawah and stretched to the south, perhaps even beyond the straits of Bab el-Mandab and the Cape of Gardafui to the coast of Somalis".¹ According to the belief of the people, the land of Punt was located at the end of the world and, consequently, beyond it was the "Land of Ghosts".² But to include so extended a region of the Horn of Africa under the term Punt we must take into account the technical standard of the vessels of those days and the skill of the men who sailed them. In both cases these are difficult to assess. The Egyptian vessels were not sufficiently well-developed to resist and endure the monsoon wind and the Egyptians not only had no knowledge of the direction of the wind but also, at that time, had an aversion to the open sea. Furthermore, there is no account of navigation which mentions the length of the voyage and number of days required to cover the distance. In this connection, all the Egyptian sources are unanimous. Since the west coast of the Red Sea, between Suwakim and Bab el-Mandab, is the safest side,³ it is most probable that Punt was located there.

Parallel to Punt we find another term which is very often used in Egyptian hieroglyphics: *To Neter*: "The Land of Gods".⁴ The origin of this term is obscure. According to the old tradition Punt was believed to be the original abode of the gods and from here they travelled to the Nile valley where they finally settled.⁵

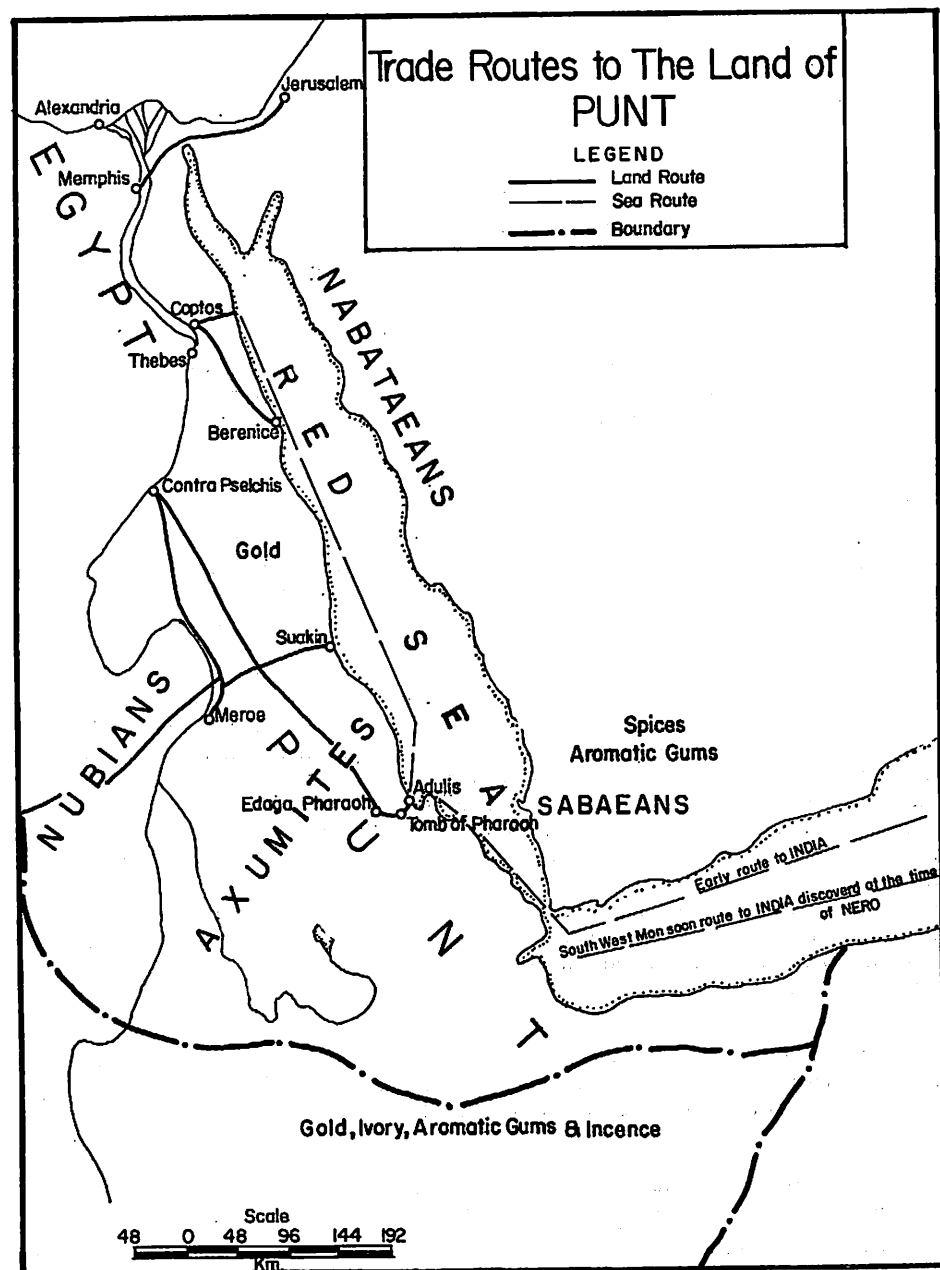
1. E. Naville, *The Tomb of Hatshopsitu, Her Life and Monuments*, (London, 1906), p. 26.

2. *Ibid.*, Cf. H. Brugsch, *A History of Egypt*, (London, 1881), Vol. I, p. 136.

3. T. Sæve Söderbergh makes the following remarks in connection with the location of Punt: "Certainly it was a most remarkable achievement to reach Punt, which must be located somewhere in the neighbourhood of Bab el-Mandab or just north of it". "The Navy of the 18th Egyptian Dynasty", *Uppsala Universitets Arsskrift* 6 (1946), p. 9; W. Budge, *A History of Egypt*, (London, 1902), Vol. I, p. 46.

4. A. Mariette believes that *Punt* and *To Neter* are two distinct terms. See *Les listes géographiques des Pytônes de Karnak, comprenant la Palestine, l'Éthiopie, les pays des Soumals*, (Leipzig, 1875), p. 60.

5. H. Brugsch, *A History*, vol. I, p. 136.



From the time of the Middle Kingdom ⁶ there came into existence another term, Kush. It was used for the region which lies immediately below Egypt to the south, and it also came under the immediate influence of Egypt from a political and cultural, as well as an economic point of view. While Punt had a commercial influence only, apart from its geographical one, there is a difference between Punt and Kush. The former term may be used to include the region of the latter, but not vice-versa.

As Naville says: "Another name of the Puntites is the Khebsi of 'the divine land'. This name is somewhat rare in the old texts, but it is frequently found at a later period in the Ptolemaic inscriptions which speak of Punt". ⁷ Whether this term is connected with *Habashat* is not certain; the writer only makes this suggestion. But since the text referred to the later period, i.e., after the migration of the *Habashat* to Ethiopia had taken place, the identification does not seem improper.

There is no significant indication in Egyptian sources of the origin of the Puntites. These people, however, were regarded by the Egyptians as having the same origin as the Egyptians themselves. If we study the physical characteristics of the Puntites from the picture of Deir el-Bahri, we find that they differ little from Egyptians. In this way it might be possible to classify these people as a race of Hamitic stock whose homeland was Asia and who emigrated to Africa at a certain time and settled down in the coastal area of the Red Sea. They were a highly institutionalized society, ruled by kings. The people were pastoral and exported their goods to Egypt. The main commodities could be classified into the following major items:

MINERALS

Antimony
Electrum
Gold
Gold dust
Lapis Lazuli
Malachite
Silver
Eye cosmetic

ANIMALS and PRODUCTS of ANIMAL ORIGIN

Apes
Asses
Bulls
Calves
Cynocephali
Feathers
Giraffes
Greyhounds
Ivory
Monkeys
Ostrich Eggs
Ostrich feathers
Oxen
Panthers
Panther skins
Rhinoceros Horn

WOOD and RELATED PRODUCTS

Balsam
Boomerangs
Cinnamon Wood
Ebony
Fragrant Gums
Frankincense
Incense
Khesit Wood
Myrrh (dried)
Myrrh trees
Resin

These articles were exported to Egypt for various purposes: for ritual use, as cosmetics, perfumes, drugs, aromatics, and for the manufacture of garments, instruments etc. Among these products the most essential ones were frankincense and myrrh: indispensable materials for religious practices. There were fourteen different kinds of frankincense, each of which was used for a different purpose. Dwarfs were also exported to Egypt to

⁶ W. Vycichl, "Le Pays de Kouch dans une inscription éthiopienne": *AE* 2, (1957), p.177.

⁷ E. Naville, *The Tomb*, pp. 35-36.

dance in the temple, to amuse the gods and also to be used as keepers of the royal treasury.⁸ The question now is, what were the goods which were taken in exchange? In this respect, the ancient Egyptian sources are not very clear. From the Deir el-Bahri pictures we see that the captain of Queen Hatshepsut had put on the table necklaces, axes, daggers, trinkets and bracelets. These might have been some of the goods which were brought for exchange.

Since the commodities of Punt were indispensable for the religious and social life of Egypt, the Pharaohs used to send expeditions to the land of Punt regularly. Scholars believe that the beginning of these expeditions is as old as Egyptian history itself.⁹ However, information is available only from the time of the V Dynasty.¹⁰ In the thirteenth year of his reign, Sahure (2743-2731 B.C.) sent an expedition to the land of Punt, which succeeded in its mission and returned home safely, bringing great quantities of myrrh, ebony and electrum. During the V Dynasty under Asosi, the expeditions to Punt continued. The Treasurer of the God Bawardede reached Punt and brought back a dancing dwarf who caused such a sensation that he was remembered centuries later.¹¹ In the VI Dynasty, at the time of Pepi II (2625-2475) an expedition under a captain called Sebni was sent farther south to the land of Punt. It seems that the captain went by land down the Red Sea coast and there he built vessels for his journey to Punt. He brought back a rich store of resins, as well as ivory, gold and skins. Towards the end of the VI Dynasty, the journey to Punt was so common that a servant of two successive treasurers of the gods claimed that he had seventeen times journeyed with his masters to Byblos and then to Punt and always had returned safely.¹² A certain captain named Harkhuf returned safely from the land of Punt with his soldiers and brought all good tribute from there including a "Dink", who was a dancer of the gods.¹³

From the VII to the X Dynasty (2475-2160 B.C.) we do not hear about any expeditions to the land of Punt not because the Egyptians did not need products from there but because of certain internal difficulties which meant that the voyages were temporarily abandoned. It is very difficult, however, to believe that during this long period, commodities like incense were not used. They probably managed to obtain such vital products through other channels.¹⁴ Senekhkere, the last Pharaoh of the XI Dynasty, revived the commercial links with the land of Punt. In the eighth year of his reign, he ordered his officer Henu to equip transport vessels to go to the land of Punt. The main object of this expedition was to bring fresh incense. Henu left Coptos with 3,000 men and reached the port which

8. J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents*, Vol. I, (New York, 1962), p. 260; Sir A. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, (Oxford, 1961), p. 99; T. Säve-Söderbergh, *Agypten und Nubien*, (Lund, 1941), p. 7 ff.

9. A. Toussaint, *Histoire de l'océan indien*, (Paris, 1961), p. 14; J. H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt*, (London, 1951), p. 127.

10. H. Kees, *Ancient Egypt*, (London, 1961), p. 110.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 111; M. H. Granthier, *L'Égypte pharaonique: II Partie, Précis de l'Histoire d'Égypte*, Vol. I, (Cairo, 1932), p. 85; J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records*, Vol. I, pp. 70 and 170.

12. Kees, *op. cit.*, p. 110; A. Toussaint, *op. cit.*, p. 14; M. C. Boreux, "L'art de la navigation en Égypte jusqu'à la fin de l'Ancien Empire": *Mémoires publiés de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*: (Le Caire, 1925), p. 134; A. Koster, "Zur Seefahrt der alten Aegypter": *Zeitschrift fuer Aegyptische Sprache*, 58 (1923), p. 117.

13. J. H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt*, p. 139; W. M. F. Petrie, *A History of Egypt from the Earliest Times to the XVth Dynasty*, (London, 1899), p. 100.

14. G. A. Wainwright believes that during this time the Puntites themselves were bringing the commodities of their own country to Egypt. "Early Foreign Trade in East Africa": *Man* 47 (1947) p. 143; J. H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt*, p. 274; E. Naville, *The Tomb of Hatshepsut*, p. 27; M. H. Crowther, *L'Égypte pharaonique*, p. 95; A. Koster, *Zur Seefahrt*, p. 130.

is now Kosseir. There he built transport ships and then set out for his destination. He has left us no record of the length of his voyage or about the spot where he landed.

In the Middle Kingdom the expeditions to Punt continued. Amenemhat II (1938-1903 B.C.), sent his captain Khentkhetwer who returned safely from Punt.¹⁵ Thutmose III (1501-1447) of XVIII Dynasty had relations with the land of Punt. The inscription of this Pharaoh, in connection with the expedition to Punt has significance for us because it contains some names of tribes and places which are equivalent to those in Ethiopia. In this inscription, the names Outoulit, Amasu and Tekaru are mentioned. These are most probably equivalent to Adulis, Hamasien and Tigré.¹⁶

The expeditions to the land of Punt continued during the reign of Queen Hatshepsut of the XVIII Dynasty. This is the best documented expedition in existence. We do not know exactly when it took place, but it seems most probable that it occurred during the ninth year of the Queen's reign. The captain who was entrusted with the transport of the soldiers to the land of Punt was Nehasi, the negro. The Egyptians felt no aversion towards other races. His title was "prince, chancellor, first friend wearing the collar". This indicates that he occupied the very highest rank of the administrative hierarchy.¹⁷ He took with him five ships and came safely to the land of the Punt, where the Egyptian sailors admired the sight of the huts of the inhabitants which were accessible from the ground only by means of ladders. The king, Perahu, came out with his wife, sons and daughters to welcome and greet the strangers. Soon trading began. The Puntites brought the products of their land, especially great quantities of myrrh and gold. The Egyptians loaded their ships "very heavily with marvels of the country of Punt; all goodly fragrant woods of God's-Land, heaps of myrrh-resins, of fresh myrrh-trees, with ebony and pure ivory, with green gold of Emu, with cinnamon-wood, with incense, eye cosmetic, with baboons, monkeys, dogs, with skins of the southern panther, with natives and their children. Never was the like of this brought for any king who has been since the beginning".¹⁸ The Queen was so delighted by the success of this expedition, that she "immediately presented a portion of them (the goods) to Amon".¹⁹ These events were regarded as "one of the greatest feats of the Egyptian Navy and as a rediscovery of distant Punt."²⁰ Expeditions were continued during successive dynasties which were as brilliant or successful as Queen Hatshepsut's.

No doubt the present Ethiopian Empire was included within the region of Punt. But for two main reasons, the activities of ancient Egyptians in Ethiopia are not well-known. First and foremost, there has been no systematic archaeological excavation in Ethiopia to enable us to estimate the extent of Egyptian influence. Secondly, we must bear in mind that the relationship was strictly limited to commerce. The Egyptians who came to the land of Punt stayed in this region only long enough to collect the commodities they wanted. Following that, they returned home. So we must not expect extensive influence from this short-lived stay. However, they left with vivid memories of Ethiopia. Of course, during their occasional visits the Egyptians had certain places where they lived and carried out their transactions. The names of these places can still be traced in

15. Breasted, *Ancient Records*, Vol. I, p. 275.

16. A. Paul affirms this by saying that: "There was a steady and profitable trade in aromatics, frankincense and myrrh, across Tigré to the river ports of the Nile valley", *A History of the Beja Tribes of the Sudan*, (Cambridge, 1954), p. 27.

17. E. Naville, *The Tomb*, pp. 29-30; *Ibidem*, *The Temples*, Part III, p. 14.

18. Translation of the text by J. H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt*, pp. 276-277.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 277.

19. Säve-Söderbergh, *The Navy*, p. 9.

some parts of northern Ethiopia. In Cohaito, Eritrea, people show visitors a grave alleged to be the tomb of a Pharaoh. The fact that the people refer to the Pharaoh instead of the Egyptians, indicates how old this tradition is.

In Ethiopian daily life, we can trace some Egyptian influence. The boats which are sailed on Lakes Tana, Zuway and Haiq in Ethiopia are typically Egyptian. In the domestic sphere, we find ornaments and instruments of Egyptian origin. The beads and bracelets which are still worn in the highlands of Ethiopia are similar to those which we see on the engravings of Egyptian monuments. The eye cosmetics of Egyptian and Ethiopian ladies still bear the same name—"Kohl". Among musical instruments, the sistra which are widely used in Ethiopian churches, are undoubtedly of Egyptian origin in the same way as the lyre. It is interesting to note here that the word *dink*: 'dwarf' is used in the Hamitic and Semitic languages of Ethiopia. In ritual practices incense is still used in Ethiopia as in ancient Egypt. The word for incense is also the same (*ḏmṛ*—*Etan*). Incense is also much used in private houses because of its pleasant odour. I do not think that all these things are merely accidental points of similarity. In addition to that, James Bruce saw a stele at Aksum dedicated to the God Horus which no longer exists.²¹ But he copied the inscription and published it. The content is a short prayer. Such hieroglyphics were used from very early times to the later Dynasties. From this stele for Horus which was located in Aksum, it would be rather difficult to decide the date from the content only. The only thing that can be said is that it was an Egyptian product and was brought here by Egyptian merchants.

2. Ethiopia and South Arabia

Ethiopia is separated from southern Arabia by the Red Sea. As is well-known, the inhabitants of South Arabia are of Semitic stock, who most probably came from Mesopotamia long before our era and settled in this region. Although they belonged to the same race, in the course of time, they formed different states. Among these four are well-attested: Ma'in, Saba, Kataban and Hadramawt. The oldest kingdom is believed to have been Ma'in.

Ethiopia had relations with all these kingdoms in general, and with Saba in particular. For demographic and economic reasons, the people of South Arabia started to migrate to Ethiopia. It is hard to fix the date of these migrations, but it can be said that the first immigration took place before 1,000 B.C.²²

Most probably the forerunners of the migration were merchants of the Sabaeen kingdom.²³ After they had studied the climatic as well as the economic conditions of Ethiopia, these people advised their countrymen to emigrate. Of course the process was long and gradual and the motive was utilitarian and political in character. The idea was to settle and live peacefully in the "new world" which had been discovered by merchants. The whole process of this migration took place by the Red Sea, i.e., through Bab el-Man-

21. B. van de Walle reproduced, translated and commented on it ("Le cippe d'Horus découvert par J. Bruce à Aksum"): *Chronique d'Égypte* 55 (1953).

22. D. Nielsen, *Handbuch der altarabischen Altertumskunde*, (Copenhagen, 1927), Vol. I, p. 31; J. Doresse, *L'Empire du Prêtre Jean, L'Éthiopie antique*, Vol. I, (Paris, 1957), p. 92; H.v. Wissmann, "Geographische Grundlagen und Frühzeit der Geschichte Südarabiens": *Saeculum*, 4, (1953), p. 102 ff; C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, (Bergamo, 1928), p. 94 ff; E. Glaser, *Die Abessinier*, p. 24.

23. C. Conti Rossini, "Sugli Habasat": *RRAL*, serie V, Vol. 25 (1906), pp. 38-59; *Ibidem*, "Expéditions et possessions des Habasat en Arabie": *JA* 18 (1921), p. 6 ff.; M. Höffner, "Ueber sprachliche und kulturelle Beziehungen zwischen Südarabien und Aethiopien im Altertum": *ACISE*, (Rome 1960), p. 435.

dab (The Gate of Tears) where they crossed and settled in their new homeland. We are not in a position to tell how long this process of migration took, but one thing is certain, that once contact had started it did not stop, and there was constant communication between the two areas.

The tribes who migrated to Ethiopia were many, but we know today of only two: the *Habashat* and the *Agazian* (Gazé).²⁴ The former has been attested to by South Arabian inscriptions,²⁵ while the latter is mentioned only in the Adulis inscriptions of the unknown emperor of Ethiopia. In the trilingual inscriptions of Ezana, only once is the name of Habashat mentioned and that is in the Sabaeen and Ge'ez texts. Agazian (Gazé) is a popular term among the Ethiopians. Their ancient language is called Ge'ez and in Ethiopian literature there is a tendency to call the country the land of Agazian, (*ገዛገዛ ለግዛገዛ*) while Habashat was avoided in official as well as in literary texts. The term *Gazé*, as an official name seems to be very old, since the commentator of the Adulis inscription identifies it with Aksum and its surroundings. But today we have a corrupt form of this name Akile Guzay,²⁶ attributed to the whole region of southern Eritrea, which was directly connected with the old port of Adulis.

Since archaeological excavation today in Ethiopia is still in its infancy, we cannot draw a line to show exactly the extent of the area which was occupied by the Semitic groups in Ethiopia. There is no doubt, however, that the majority of the immigrants in Northern Ethiopia nowadays are in the provinces of Eritrea and Tigré. Nevertheless, if we take the Semitic languages and, to a certain extent, the ethnic groups as evidence for our purpose, we can trace South Arabian vestiges in East Ethiopia as far as Harrar²⁷ and its surroundings. Moreover, since this region is not far from Bab el-Mandab, it is not at all illogical to make that assertion. In Northern Ethiopia the place-names and the Sabaeen civilization allow us to trace the area, or rather the centre, where South Arabian immigrants settled. The nostalgic memories of their home-land led them to name their new country after the original place names of South Arabia. Most of these names are still preserved today in Ethiopia, some in a slightly corrupt form. Assab, one of the two ports of Ethiopia today, is a corrupt form of Saba and this name is found in works of Greek geographers.²⁸ The fact that this place is named after the Sabat of South Arabia reminds us of the disembarkation sites of the immigrants and the particular tribes who used them. E. Glaser identifies this place with that in Hadramawt, east Yemen, and on the map of H. von Wissmann and M. Höffner we find a place named Sabat in the same region.²⁹ Now, whether or not we can consider migrants from this district in South Arabia as founders of the port of Assab remains a hypothetical question. Since the origin of the name,

24. *DAE*, I, pp. 41; Conti Rossini, "Expéditions et possessions", p. 8; A.J. Drewes, *Inscriptions de l'Éthiopie antique*, p. 91 ff; A. Caquot and J. Leclant, "Arabie du Sud et Afrique.-Examen d'une hypothèse récente": *AE* 1 (1955), pp. 119-120.

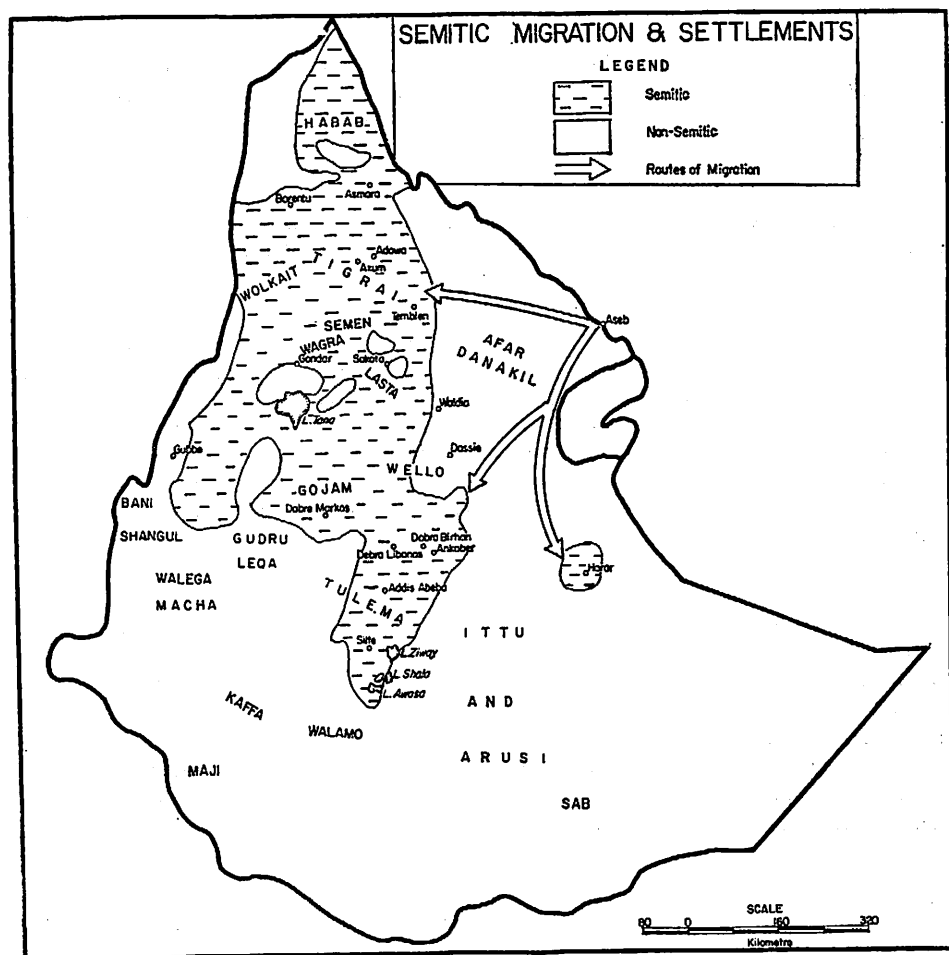
25. A. Jamme, *Sabaeen Inscriptions from Mahram Bilqis* (Märib), (Baltimore, 1962), pp. 60-64; H.v. Wissmann and M. Höffner, "Beiträge zur historischen Geographie des vorislamischen Süd-Arabien": *Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften Klasse*, Jahrg. 1952 No. 2 see map.

26. The local legend attributes the origin of the name to two brothers, Akile and Guzay. From this to infer Akile as being another South Arabian tribe who migrated to Ethiopia would be, at this stage at least, unduly precipitate.

27. A. Caquot and J. Leclant, "Arabie du Sud et Afrique", pp. 119-120; Conti Rossini, *Storia*, p. 102; Glaser, *Die Abessinier*, p. 95.

28. Conti Rossini, "Expéditions et possessions des Habasat en Arabie": *JA* 18, (1921), p. 6; J. Doresse, *L'Empire*, Vol. I, p. 69.

29. E. Glaser, *Die Abessinier*, p. 19; v. Wissmann and M. Höffner, "Beiträge," see map.



however, is South Arabian, one can assume this to be the case.

In the province of Tigré there is a district called Sahart. The same name, Sahartan, exists in Arabia about 75 km. from Hodeida on the coast of the Red Sea.³⁰ And near Sahart in Tigré there is also another district which was once important, called Hauzen, from South Arabian Hausan. To the southwest of Yeha, there is a place which is called Madara. Madran is found to be the name of a place in a South Arabian inscription (Kataban). Northwest of Yeha there is a district which is called Ahsea. This corresponds to Ahsiyah of Tihama in Yemen. Near Senafé, Eritrea, there is a city which was called Coloë in ancient times. This name recalls Cullai in Kataban. Serae is named after Sarwan, the Sarat Mountains in Yemen. Another place, Biscia, between Agordat and Cassala, can be identified with Bahilah in Central Yemen. The settlers also named the river Mareb after the well-known dam of Marib.

Apart from these similar place-names, we have cities which were founded by the immigrants from South Arabia. Yeha is an example. The name Awwam which appears in the Sabaeen inscription from this site most probably is the name of the temple of Yeha after the Almouqah temple at Marib.³¹ We do not know whether this name is of South Arabian origin. Yeha gives us an idea where the South Arabian immigrants had their centre. For this purpose they always chose a place with strategic significance and with agricultural potential. Yeha was founded at the foot of a mountain to the east of which extends a plain with running water. Obviously the settlers used the mountain for protection. This phenomenon is visible in almost all pre-Aksumite cities of Ethiopia.³² The centres with South Arabian remains will help us to indicate roughly the extent of the influence of South Arabian settlers. These stretched from the coastal area of the Red Sea as far as the Barka River and West Tekazze River; at present it is difficult to define the southern limit of South Arabian influence.³³ (See map)

It now remains to mention the main contributions of these newcomers to Ethiopia. According to their particular characteristics, these can be divided into six categories: architecture, irrigation, agriculture, political organization, religion and language.

Architecture: To their new country, the South Arabians brought the art of building from their homeland. The houses there were made from stone and built in a rectangular shape. The roof was also covered with stone and sand. They were obliged to build this kind of house because of the nature of the land and the climate. There, most areas were desert, and wood for house-building could not be found in abundance. Moreover, the stone house is best suited to a hot land. It provides a moderate temperature in winter and summer. Although in their new country wood was available in great quantity, they continued to build the same type of houses. Even today in northern Ethiopia people build just as they did in ancient times.³⁴ Likewise the temples they built did not differ essentially in style from those of South Arabia. The temple of Yeha "is 20 yds. 1ft. 2 1/2 ins. in length, and 16 yds. 1ft. 7 3/4 ins. in width. On the east side there are preserved fifty-two courses, and on the top of this ran the pattern given in the illustration. The building was probably about 50 ft. in height and there are no traces of a window in it. The stone

30. H. von Wissmann, "Ancient History": *Le Muséon* 77 (1965), p. 473.

31. W. v. Wissmann, *Zur Geschichte und Landeskunde von Altsuedarabien*, (Wien, 1954), p. 35.

32. Most of these cities are not yet known to the scholarly world. The author had a chance to see some unknown old cities like Hinzat, east of Adua, and Adi Kewih near Wigro. The former has a number of stelae, well-hewn and decorated, but all of them have fallen; the latter contains Sabaeen ruins and inscriptions.

33. Conti Rossini, *Storia*, pp. 103-104.

34. *DAE*, III, p. 41.

large, and put together without cement".³⁵ There is a striking similarity between this temple of Yeha and those found in South Arabia.³⁶ It is the oldest monument in existence in Ethiopia. According to the experts it was built between the 7th and 5th centuries B.C.³⁷ In other places of northern Ethiopia we have relics of old temples of South Arabian origin, but the picture which we get from them is not as vivid as that from the temple of Yeha.³⁸

Irrigation: In South Arabia rivers are very rare and, for that reason, the inhabitants used to build dams in as many areas as possible. Dams were usually built at the foot of a mountain for practical reasons, in order to have a strong wall on one side. This kind of dam we also find near Cohaito in Safra which was built at the foot of a hill. The purpose of the dams in South Arabia was not only to supply drinking water for inhabitants and their cattle, but also for irrigation. They were built for the same purpose in Ethiopia. Although there was considerable rainfall in the rainy season, probably they used the dam water for irrigation, at least in the summer.³⁹

Agriculture: As we find in the shelter paintings, the Ethiopians started pastoral life in prehistoric times. Most probably at that remote period, the people of Ethiopia were using metal to prepare agricultural implements, i.e. ploughs.⁴⁰ In this respect, the contribution of the South Arabians was that they brought some animals with them—namely horses, camels, sheep and goats—and some technical improvements with regard to ploughing.

Political Organization: The South Arabian immigrants to Ethiopia brought with them their own political organization. In South Arabia the *Mukarrib* system existed. The *Mukarrib* was most probably a king with three-fold power: he was the high priest, absolute judge and commander-in-chief in the battle-field. This is because it was believed that he was a direct descendant of God and therefore his supreme rule should be accepted absolutely. His divine descent dictated also his right as supreme judge, and on the battle-field by his divine power, he always conquered his enemies. This type of political organization was established here in Ethiopia. In the inscriptions we find that the king was the son of a certain god, especially the god of war and he was never conquered by his enemies.

Religion: In South Arabia, religion entered into every aspect of life. Because of the concept that divine protection was necessary for the success of every being and every act, not only tribes and families but also states and agricultural and commercial groups all had their tutelary deities. Propitiatory and dedicatory ceremonies were performed in connection with any activity of importance. Temples, laws, official acts, funeral stelae—all were put in the care of the gods, who avenged any violation or profanation of them. Tithes and other sources of income were allotted to them in order to ensure ample funds for the maintenance of their temples. The upkeep of the temples was the task of the priests who were well-organized.

Sacrifices of various animals were offered, including oxen and sheep, often in great numbers. There were also bloodless sacrifices in the form of libations and the offer-

35. T. Bent, *The Sacred City of the Ethiopians*, p. 138.

36. J. Doresse, *L'Empire*, Vol. I, p. 74, n. 1.

37. Glaser, *Die Abessinier*, p. 13.

38. *DAE*, II, pp. 110–124; H. de Contenson, "Les fouilles à Haoulti": *AE* 5 (1963), p. 41.

39. G. Caton-Thompson, *The Tombs and Moon-Temple of Hureidha* (Hadramaut), (Oxford, 1944), p. 9 ff.

40. G. Bailloud, "La préhistoire de l'Éthiopie avec bibliographie", p. 31. The author here assumes that these pastoral paintings were executed in historic times; *DAE*, IV, p. 41.

ing of incense.⁴¹

The pantheon of South Arabia consisted of many gods. One of the main gods was Astar or Astat, the male god of heaven. The worship of this god was common to all Semitic countries, the only difference being that this god was worshipped by the other Semitic people as a female goddess. Another important god was Ilmouqah or Almouqah, the god of the moon. An altar with a Sabaeen inscription was dedicated to this god in northern Ethiopia. It bears geometrical decorations and the symbol of the god, the crescent and disc,⁴² of the god of light. The feminine goddess was Shams, goddess of the sun. She is attested to by an inscription in Akile-Guzay, northern Ethiopia. A temple and altar were dedicated to her.⁴³ Her worship was widely practised among the Semites. In Yeha two South Arabian gods, Nurau and Sin, are attested to by Sabaeen inscription. The first was believed to be a god of light and sometimes is identified with 'Attar'.⁴⁴ The second, Sin, was the principal god in Hadramawt and there he is known by the name Lm. Under this appellation he is mentioned only in Yeha on the altar in a Sabaeen dedicatory inscription which reads "Sacrificial altar of Sin".⁴⁵ But the principal god in Ethiopia in pre-Christian times was Mahrem, patron and personal god of the emperors. Ezana, until his conversion to Christianity, claimed to be and insisted on calling himself the son of Mahrem. In the parallel Greek inscription Mahrem was replaced by Ares, who was a god of the Greek pantheon. In spite of this, Mahrem is believed to be a South Arabian god and identified with Hariman, god of the moon.⁴⁶

Language: The main contribution of the South Arabian immigrants was to language. They introduced into Ethiopia the Sabaeen language, which had an alphabet. Sabaeen is one of the Semitic languages but belongs to the southern group. The type of writing was Boustrophedon (plough-wise). Those who came from South Arabia used this language. Even today we find many Sabaeen inscriptions in different parts of northern Ethiopia. According to the opinion of experts, the oldest known inscription belongs to the 5th century.⁴⁷ Although the Sabaeen inscriptions in Ethiopia exhibit certain differences from those of South Arabia, as a whole this has not evoked as serious a challenge as Ge'ez. Until the first half of this century the accepted theory was that Ge'ez, with its script was derived from Sabaeen. As long as archaeological excavations bring to light new material, this idea is constantly losing ground. Ge'ez alienated itself from the Sabaeen and its origin has not yet been crystallised.⁴⁸

These are the main contributions of South Arabian immigrants to Ethiopia. The question follows: Is Ethiopian civilization just a copy of that of South Arabia? It is true that every ancient country has been influenced by another country, but the way in which

41. Some people prefer to think that in Ethiopia in the pre-Christian period the people practised human sacrifice. They draw this conclusion from the inscription of Ezana in which was stated that Ezana gave for his personal god, Mahrem (Ares), cattle and men. *DAE*, IV, No. 10. But this does not necessarily imply human sacrifice; it could be a sort of hierodoulia, which was widely practised in the Greek world. Since Greek influence was strong, we are inclined to think in these terms.

42. A. Caquot and A. J. Drewes, "Les monuments", p. 26 ff.; M. Höffner, "Die Semiten Aethiopiens" *Woerterbuch der Mythologie*, ed. H.W. Haussig (1962), p. 565.

43. A. J. Drewes, "The Inscription from Dibdib in Eritrea": *Bi. Or.* 11 (1954) p. 185 ff.; *Ibidem*, "Nouvelles inscriptions de l'Éthiopie": *Bi. Or.* 13 (1956), p. 180.

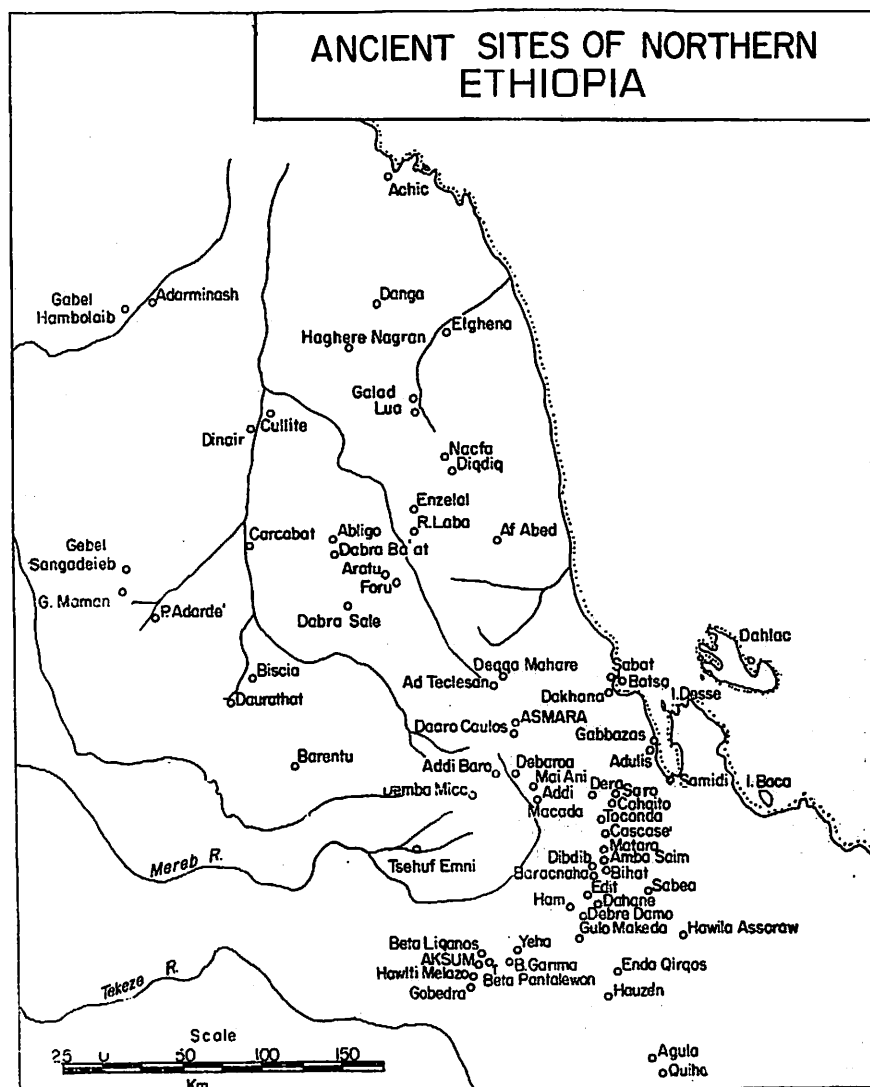
44. M. Höffner, "Südarabien (Saba, Kataban u.a.)": *Woerterbuch*, op. cit. p. 520.

45. *DAE*, IV, p. 60; Bent, *The Sacred City*, p. 140; H. de Contenson, "Les fouilles à Haoulti en 1959; Rapport préliminaire": *AE* 5. (1963), p. 41 ff.; M. Höffner, "Ueber sprachliche", op. cit., p. 434.

46. M. Höffner, "Semiten Aethiopiens", p. 560.

47. A. J. Drewes, *Inscriptions*, p. 92.

48. This problem has been discussed in detail in the work of Drewes, *Inscriptions*, p. 89 ff.



foreign elements are assimilated is different. Here, especially, eastern civilization differs from the west. In the former an element of one civilization carried over from another is retained without essential change. Therefore, we see similarities in the civilizations of the Oriental countries. But in the west, the external shape of the original character is not maintained and the identity of the original is lost completely. Each one has its own characteristics which differ from another. Therefore, the mental and physical achievements of each civilization are also unique and cannot be repeated. On the other hand, since there is constant progress in human society, which adds something new to what has been received from another, it is impossible to assimilate foreign influences without change.

Now let us try to answer the above question. Before the coming of South Arabian immigrants to Ethiopia, the inhabitants of this country did not lack a civilization. To what extent this civilization was developed, at this stage, we are not in a position to say. But there are some relics we find from the Sabaeen civilization which flourished in Ethiopia later. On the other hand, the immigrants came here in peace; they did not come here to capture the country by force. They simply migrated to secure a better life by peaceful means. They were obedient to the existing laws and customs of the country. But, because of the higher quality of their culture, they could influence the people, although the influence had its limitations. I think it is necessary to elaborate further on this point. If we take the political organization, there is a difference between the *Mukarrib* system of Ethiopia which has a particular quality we do not find in the South Arabian concept. This particular characteristic of the *Mukarrib* is in the use of the title and in the word itself. The Ethiopian *Mukarrib* does not bear the traditional names of the South Arabian *Mukarrib*. The title is changed into *Mlk*, the translation of which is "king".⁴⁹ If sometimes *Mkrb* is used in the Ethiopian inscriptions, by its side stands the word *Mlk* as a special title. And the names of the king's predecessors are not the names of South Arabians, but of Ethiopians.

In the language we also have two groups. One, Sabaeen which is gradually losing its identity, and the other group which is very similar to Ge'ez. The second group, Ethiopic, is not Sabaeen in origin, although it reveals a certain amount of Sabaeen influence. It is rather Kushitic in origin and after the Sabaeen influence, it started to develop as an independent language, Ge'ez. In addition to that, in the religion and art of Ethiopia we find certain differences. In the pre-Christian period of Ethiopia, the people worshipped gods which were not found in South Arabia. Sculpture was highly developed. The statues found in Ethiopia were very beautifully executed, large and numerous. The incense altars of Hawlti are circular, but those of South Arabia are rectangular. And also the statue found at Hawlti is very large, but in South Arabia large statues have never been found. The throne at this place also has no similarity to those found in South Arabia.⁵⁰ Generally speaking, the Ethiopian statues are superior in many points to those of South Arabia. The throne of Hawlti indicates Egyptian influence from the period 1500 B.C. The bas-reliefs found on both sides look like the engravings of Deir el-Bahari, but the inscription engraved on it is in Sabaeen characters.

The influence of South Arabia on Ethiopia can be compared with that of the Greeks upon the Romans. The Greeks who exercised influence there were not organized colonizers, but teachers and traders. But these few Greeks gradually brought about a radical change in the life of Rome. The same thing can be said for the South Arabian immigrants. They were not organized colonizers, but they influenced the inhabitants here in many respects.

⁴⁹ Drewes, *Inscriptions*, p. 96.

⁵⁰ H. de Contenson, "Les fouilles", p. 42.

Of course, this influence was on the existing civilization, and it was not static, but in time changed and assumed its own form and shape. Perhaps this can be better illustrated from Ethiopian written sources.

On the subject of the arrival of the South Arabians in Ethiopia, we have found a new source in Ethiopian manuscripts. *Gedle Afse* has recently been discovered.⁵¹ On the last page of this manuscript there is a Ge'ez text which speaks about the coming of the South Arabians. In this text it is stated that in the year 3510 from the creation of the world, i.e., 1990 B.C. people came from Arabia because their country was over-populated. They established their capital city in Yeha. They called in technicians from Babylon to build great buildings; in addition, they dug earthen caves like boxes for their treasury and put precious stones in them. After that they had built a great palace which took fifteen years to complete. And in it there lived two kings of Semitic origin whose names were Soba and Noba. They reigned about 362 years. When war began in Asia, they went there to fight the enemies of their mother-country. After their departure the Kushitic people in the country rose up and destroyed the buildings in order to eradicate the memory of the Semitic people once and for all. They built a new palace and continued to reign in the country until the coming of the Israelites in 982 B.C.

Gedle Afse itself contains the same information with some changes. Here it is not mentioned that Soba and Noba returned to their mother-country. On the contrary, they are said to have reigned in the country for about 235 years until their death. Noba was the king in Amhara and Soba in northern Ethiopia. The people still living in Yeha believe that the city was built by Soba and Noba.

This text is actually taken from an Aksumite chronicle and it gives some of the historical background of the city. It is the first time that we have found in Ethiopian sources something about the coming of immigrants from Yemen to Ethiopia. The archaeological mission to Yeha in 1959 discovered well-hewn, box-like caves in which many objects were found which today are displayed in the Archaeological Museum; such things as pottery, axes, etc. Without any doubt here was the centre of the Sabaeans in early times. The text, especially the first part of it, supports the theory that the civilization of this country is indigenous, but with influences from South Arabia.

3. Ethiopia and Israel

According to the existing written Ethiopian sources,⁵² Ethiopia had relations with Israel. As it is mentioned in the Ethiopian sources, the relations began through commerce and then developed into the political sphere, etc. This relationship was at a peak in the time of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba at the beginning of the first millennium. That the Queen of Sheba went to Jerusalem to see King Solomon is beyond doubt. We find proofs in the Bible:

And when the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord she came to prove him with hard questions.

And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon,

51. Sergew Hable-Selassie, "New Historical Elements from «Gedle Afse»": *JSS*, 9 (1964), pp. 200-203.

52. C. Bezold, "Kebra Nagast, die Herrlichkeit der Könige": *Abhandlungen der Kgl. Bayr. Akademie der Wissenschaften* 23 (1905); W. Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and her only son Menelik*, (London, 1922); F. Praetorius, *Fabula de Regina Sabaea apud Aethiopes*, (Halle, 1870); A. Chastel, "La légende de la reine de Saba": *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 129 (1939), pp. 204-225.

she communed with him of all that was in her heart.

And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not any thing hid from the king, which he told her not.

And when the Queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built,

And the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the Lord; there was no more spirit in her.

And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom.

Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard.

Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom.

Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgement and justice.

And she gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon".⁵³

With some variation we find the same story in Chronicles.⁵⁴ About this fact Jesus Christ said: "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon."⁵⁵

If we go further in Jewish sources we find the following details in the work of F. Josephus⁵⁶ of the first century A.D.:

Now the woman who at that time ruled as Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia, was thoroughly trained in wisdom and remarkable in other ways, and when she heard of Solomon's virtue and understanding, was led to him by a strong desire to see him, which arose from the things told daily about his country. For wishing to be convinced by experience and not merely by hearsay—which is likely to give assent to a false belief and then convinced one of the opposite since it depends wholly on those who bring reports – she decided to go to him, and being very desirous of herself making trial of his wisdom by propounding questions and asking him to solve their difficult meaning, she came to Jerusalem with great splendour and show of wealth. For she brought with her, camels laden with gold and various spices and precious stones. And the king received her gladly on her arrival and was studious to please her in all ways, in particular by mentally grasping with ease the ingenious problems she set to him and solving them more quickly than any could have expected. But she was amazed at Solomon's wisdom when she realized how extraordinary it was and how much more excellent upon trial than

53. I Kings X: 1-10.

54. II Chronicles IX: 1-9.

55. Matthew XII: 42; Luke XI: 32.

56. F. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, ed. J. Thackeray and R. Marcus, (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1961), Vol. VIII, pp. 165-175.

what she had heard about it. She especially admired the palace for its beauty and size and, no less, for the arrangement of the buildings, for in this she saw the great wisdom of the king. But she was more than amazed at the hall called the Forest of Libanos and the lavishness of the daily meals and his table-ware and service and the apparel of his attendants, as well as the decorum combined with skill of their serving; and not least the sacrifices daily offered to God and the care bestowed on them by the priests and Levites. Seeing these things day by day, she admired them beyond measure, and was not able to contain her amazement at what she saw, but showed clearly, how much admiration she felt, for she was moved to address the king in words which revealed how greatly overcome were her feelings by the things we have described. 'All things indeed, o King' she said, 'that come to our knowledge through hearsay are received with mistrust, but concerning the good things that are yours, both those which you possess in your own person, I mean your wisdom and prudence and those which the kingship gives you, it was by no means a false report that reached us; on the contrary, though it was true, it indicated a prosperity far below what I see, now being here. For the report attempted only to persuade our ears, but did not make known the dignity of your state as fully as seeing it and being in its presence showed it to be. I, for my part, did not believe the things reported because of the multitude and greatness of what I heard about them, and yet I have witnessed here things far greater than these. Fortunately do I hold the Hebrew people to be, and your servants and friends as well, who daily enjoy the sight of you and continually listen to your wisdom. Let us bless God who has so well loved this country and its inhabitants as to make you their King'.

And after she had showed by her words how she felt towards the king, she revealed her feelings still more clearly by her gifts, for she gave him twenty talents of gold and an incalculable quantity of spices and precious stones; and they say that we have the root of the opobalsamon, which our country still bears, as a result of this woman's gift. In return, Solomon also presented her with many fine gifts, in particular with those which she selected as most desirable, for there was nothing which he did not give when she asked to have it; on the contrary, he showed his magnanimity by giving up whatever she asked for more readily, than he presented gifts to her of his own choice. And so the Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia, having obtained the gifts which we have mentioned and given others to the king from among her possessions, returned to her own country".

The Talmudic sources interpret the events of I Kings X in quite a different way from what was literally stated in the text. The Babylonian Talmud of the 3rd century A.D. attempts to interpret this passage in a metaphoric sense and says "whoever says that the *malkath* (queen) of Sheba was a woman is in error; the word *malkath* here means the kingdom of Sheba".⁵⁷ These are the sources of Israel concerning the Queen of Sheba. The main problem is whence did this queen come. Two nations claim that she belongs to them, the Ethiopians and the South Arabians. Let us look at the argument put forward by each of them.

The main Ethiopian source for the story of the Queen of Sheba is the *Kibre-Negest* (Glory of the Kings). The main points in the book in this connection are as follows:

57. *The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin*, trans. by Rabbi Dr. Epstein, (London, 1935), p. 76; G. Röscher, "Die Königin von Saba als Königin Bilqis": *Jahrbuch für Protestantische Theologie* 60 (1880), p. 547.

And there was a certain wise man, the leader of a merchant's caravan, whose name was Tāmṛīn, and he used to load five hundred and twenty camels, and he possessed about three and seventy ships.

Now at that time King Solomon wished to build the House of God, and he sent out messages among all the merchants in the east and in the west, and in the north and in the south, bidding the merchants come and take gold and silver from him, so that he might take from them whatsoever was necessary for his work. And certain men reported to him concerning this rich Ethiopian merchant and Solomon sent to him a message and told him to bring whatsoever he wished from the country of Arabia, red gold and black wood that could not be eaten by worms, and sapphires. And that merchant, whose name was Tāmṛīn, the merchant of the Queen of Ethiopia, went to Solomon the King; and Solomon took whatsoever he desired from him, and he gave to the merchant whatsoever he wished for in great abundance. Now that merchant was a man of great understanding, and he saw and comprehended the wisdom of Solomon".⁵⁸

It continues by saying that the merchant returned to Ethiopia and described what he had seen in Jerusalem. 'And she became very wishful and most desirous to go that she might hear his wisdom, and see his face, and embrace him, and petition his royalty, and she announced her decision to the people, 'I am smitten with the love of wisdom and I am constrained by the cords of understanding; for wisdom is far better than the treasure of gold and silver,... And as for a kingdom, it cannot stand without wisdom... After the harangue, she 'made ready to set out. And seven hundred and ninety-seven camels were loaded, and mules and asses innumerable were loaded, and she set out on her journey... And she arrived in Jerusalem, and brought to the King very many precious gifts which he desired to possess greatly. And he paid her great honour and rejoiced'.⁵⁹ The Queen asked him many questions and Solomon answered all of them. After six months stay, the Queen wanted to return to her kingdom. By a trick he slept with her, and during the same night he dreamt that 'a brilliant sun, and it came down from heaven and shed exceedingly great splendour over Israel. And when it had tarried there for a time it suddenly withdrew itself, and it flew away to the country of Ethiopia, and it shone there with exceedingly great brightness forever, for it willed to dwell there'.⁶⁰ The King understood that he would have a child from the Queen and gave her a ring saying 'Take [this] so that thou mayest not forget me. And if it happen that I obtain seed from thee, this ring shall be unto it a sign and if it be a man child he shall come to me; and the peace of God be with thee!... and the Queen departed and came into the country of Bālā Zadisārēyā nine months and five days after she had separated from King Solomon. And the pains of childbirth laid hold upon her and she brought forth a man child and she gave it to the nurse with great pride and delight'.⁶¹ The place where she is said to have given birth to her son is on the outskirts of Asmara South, near Tsā'da Christian.⁶² She named her son Menelik and when he grew up, he went to Jerusalem to visit his father. King Solomon received him with great honour and urged his son to stay in Jerusalem 'where the House of God is, and where the Tabernacle of the Law of God is, and where God dwelleth'.⁶³ Menelik refused and decided to return

58. Budge, *The Queen of Sheba*, pp. 17-18.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-23.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

62. See the picture of the site in Conti Rossini's *Storia*, pl. LXII.

63. Budge, *The Queen of Sheba*, p. 48.

to his home-country, Ethiopia. In these circumstances, King Solomon made him king and gave him the first born sons of Israel to go with him to Ethiopia. On their departure, they stole the real Ark of the Covenant and took it with them.⁶⁴ According to the Ethiopian oral tradition, at that time Judaism was introduced to Ethiopia and the Ark of the Covenant which was given to Moses by God, is believed to be still in existence today in Aksum, the Sacred City of the Ethiopians.

It is firmly believed here in Ethiopia that the Dynasty which was started by King Menelik I still continues today in Ethiopia. And in the revised constitution of Ethiopia in 1955, in Article 2 we read: "The Imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line of Haile Selassie I, descendant of King Sahle Selassie, whose line descends without interruption from the Dynasty of Menelik I, son of the Queen of Ethiopia, the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon of Jerusalem".⁶⁵ And the Imperial emblem bears the motto "The conquering lion of Judah".

The South Arabian claim to this Queen is based on the *Quran*.⁶⁶ Here it is stated: 'I have come from Sheba to thee with a sure tiding. I found a woman ruling over them and she has been given of everything and she possesses a mighty throne.'⁶⁷ Further, it is said that she and her people believed in the sun god and not in Allah. To be sure of that Solomon sent a messenger to her with a letter. The contents of the letter were 'Rise not up against me, but come to me in surrender'.⁶⁸ Now she called a meeting of the nobles. It was decided to send gifts to him and this was done. But Solomon was not pleased with the gifts, and he sent one of his demons to bring to him the Queen and her throne also. The demons fulfilled the order and in a moment the Queen found herself before Solomon. Further it is stated that the Queen was converted to the faith of Allah.

Now if we compare the two sources, the Ethiopian and the Yemenite, we see that the second is chronologically older than the first. But if we examine the contents, we find the first better and more reasonable. I think it is worthwhile here to quote the opinion of N. Pearn and V. Barlow: "The descriptions (of the *Kibre Negest*) are full and varied, and though sometimes in a semi-mystical form are nevertheless clear and for the most part reasonable. "The Koran version," they continue, "is not so credible as the others, being confused frequently by mention of genii and magical lapwings, and other somewhat mythical utterances".⁶⁹

In addition to the *Quran*, manuscripts in which were preserved the Arabian traditions about the Queen of Sheba were found by European travellers. Commander Craufurd, for a long time adviser to the Imam of Yemen, claimed that he had found manuscripts written on age-old parchment telling of caravans headed by a beautiful Queen journeying to see Solomon. Her name was Balkis,⁷⁰ daughter of Shar Habil. Her mother was Ekeye Azeb, a princess of Ethiopia. She spent many years of her childhood in the land of her mother, returning to Marib just before the death of her father. Balkis,⁷¹ according to the

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-72

65. *Revised Constitution of Ethiopia*, (Addis Ababa, 1953), p. 3.

66. *Surah* 27: 15-45.

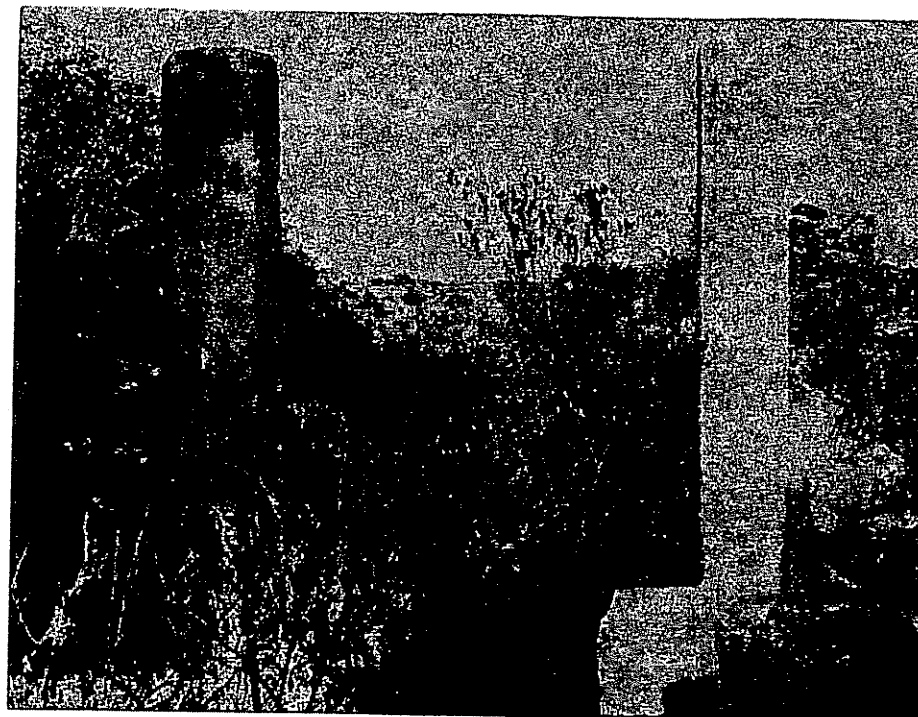
67. Trans. A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, (London, 1964), p. 384.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 385.

69. N. Pearn and V. Barlow, *Quest for Sheba*, (London, 1937), p. 251; J.B. Philby, *Sheba's Daughters*, (London, 1939), pp. 10-14.

70. The word is presumably Hebrew and has the connotation of concubine. E. Ullendorff, "Hebraic-Jewish Elements in Abyssinian (monophysite) Christianity": *JSS* 1 (1956), p. 233.

71. N. Pearn and V. Barlow, *op. cit.*, pp. 250-251.



Part of the ruins of Goulo Makeda.

Photo: Sergei

story, was the first woman candidate for the Sabaeen throne.

In Eritrea also we have more or less the same story,⁷² but here it is not mentioned that her father was from the Yemen. It seems quite true that both had a common source which each party elaborated and endowed with more local character.

In the Bible we do not find many details about the queen and her kingdom. Even her name is not mentioned. The only thing we find is that she was the Queen of Sheba. Saba was one of the four great kingdoms of South Arabia. This name is also used in Ethiopia in ancient times.

Moreover it is possible to travel to Jerusalem from both countries. From Yemen, travel to the north was frequent. From Ethiopia since earliest Pharaonic times, there were connections with Egypt. And from there, travel to Jerusalem was not difficult. It can even be said that there was direct communication with Israel.⁷³ In the same chapter of the Book of Kings which speaks about the Queen of Sheba, we read that King Solomon's ships sailed to the land of Ophir. Where is this land? It is not yet known exactly. Scholars have advanced three different theories concerning the location of Ophir, placing it in Arabia, India or East Africa. Although the majority stand for Arabia, they do not agree on the precise location of the site; some locate it in the north and others in the south. On the other hand, there is no distinct place-name there which suggests Ophir. Another school of thought supports the second view, based mainly on the commercial activities of India in ancient times and the distance which one covered from Eilat to Ophir and back, requiring three years to complete the journey. Ophir is identified with the ancient city Supara, forty miles north of Bombay. The third group identify Ophir with East Africa, because of the constant expeditions from Egypt to this region in Pharaonic times. In this case, Ethiopia is more probable as the location for two main reasons, abundant gold and platinum mines and the identical place-name, Afar.⁷⁴

Two centuries later Isaiah tells us also that the Ethiopians came with ships. "Woe to the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia: that sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters."⁷⁵ The phrase 'beyond the rivers' is an interesting clue which may help to define the land of this expedition. Isaiah here speaks about a well-organized kingdom which sends ambassadors to Israel by sea. The question is, which kingdom in Africa was powerful enough at that time to send such an expedition? Obviously, the term 'beyond the rivers' disqualifies Napata. As we know well, this old capital city of the Kushites was situated about 300 km. to the north from the junction of the two tributaries, the Blue Nile and the White Nile.⁷⁶ On the other hand, Meroë had not yet been founded to replace Napata. The kingdom which is mentioned by Isaiah is located near the sea, most probably on the west coast of the Red Sea. In history,

72. E. Littmann, "The Legend of the Queen of Sheba in the Tradition of Axum": *Bibliotheca Abessinica*, 1 (1904), pp. 1-13.

73. The itinerary of the Queen is not precisely described in *Kibre Negest*, but only mentioned in general terms.

74. There is a detailed and highly scientific article on Ophir in *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, supplément Vol. VI, 1960 by G. Ryckmans.

75. Isaiah XVIII: 1-2.

76. G.B. Gray, "A critical and exegetical commentary on the Book of Isaiah": *International Critical Commentary*, (Edinburgh, 1912), pp. 309-11. On this point B. Gemser makes the following amendment: "In the oracle on Ethiopia Is. XVIII: 1 'Ah/ land of the buzzing wings which lies *me'eber lenahar? Kus*' the 'beyond' of A.R. Gordon's translation has to be changed into 'alongside the rivers of Ethiopia' to give an appropriate meaning" (B. Gemser, Be'aber Hajjarden in Jordan's borderland): *Vetus Testamentum* 2 (1952), p. 352.

we do not know of any kingdom, except the Aksumite one which could have undertaken such an expedition. The journey undertaken by these people was peaceful in intent. They went there to conclude an alliance and to lend assistance to the Israelites in the war against their enemy, but the offer was refused on religious grounds.⁷⁷ However, from the passage of Isaiah, "Thus saith the Lord, The labour of Egypt and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabaeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee",⁷⁸ and also from Zephaniah: "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering",⁷⁹ we understand that commercial relations were welcomed and maintained.

In connection with the origin of the Queen of Sheba, no archaeological proof of her existence has yet been found in either Arabia or Ethiopia. In this century, there have been many expeditions to South Arabia. The last important one was led by Lt. J.B. Philby in 1952. Many distinguished personalities like G. Ryckmans, professor at the University of Louvain, took part in this expedition. Various inscriptions and coins have been unearthed which are precious sources for South Arabian history, but they have not found a trace of the Queen of Sheba. As regards Balkis, it is known that she was of a much later period and had no connection at all with the Queen of Sheba.⁸⁰

In Ethiopia, we have a number of archaeological sites which are traditionally connected with the Queen of Sheba such as Gulo Makida, Hinzat, the Tomb of the Queen of Sheba, the Tomb of Menelik and above all the shrine containing the alleged Ark of the Covenant. Gulo Makida (enclosure of Makida) is located between two mountains; Dongollo on the north and Focada on the south. The antiquity of this site is mentioned by many observers, particularly by J.B. Coulbeaux. According to oral tradition, this place is supposed to be the birthplace of the Queen of Sheba. In 1956 the Ethiopian Institute of Archaeology had planned to undertake excavations there; but before the experts' arrival, the site had become an object of systematic exploitation by the local people, so the experts found only an accumulation of ruins.⁸¹ The site contains foundations of an old building with columns similar to those of Coloe and a tomb with a cross which reminds one vividly of the tomb of Caleb and Gebre Meskal in Aksum.

Hinzat, located east of Adua at the bottom of a hill, is believed by the inhabitants to be the capital city of the Queen of Sheba. No excavations have been undertaken here.⁸² The fallen stelae are well-hewn and decorated and altars are scattered here and there. The location of the site on the one hand and the visible monuments on the other, suggest that Hinzat was a centre of Aksumite civilization in the pre-Christian period.

According to Aksumite tradition, the tomb of the Queen of Sheba is found about 2 km. south of the city on the left side of the Aksum-Gondar highway. Here are found accumulations of hewn and unhewn stelae. A little beyond this site on the right side⁸³

77. G.B. Gray, "A critical and exegetical commentary", p. 313.

78. Is. XLV: 14.

79. Zeph. III: 10.

80. Writing of the tenth century Yemeni historian Hamdani, Jean Doresse speaks of "...les légendes qu'il rapporte sur 'Bilkis', reine de Saba, dont le portrait, chez lui, se compose d'allusions à une princesse himyarite du iv^e siècle de notre ère et d'emprunts anachroniques à la figure biblique de l'antique mais réelle souveraine qui rendit visite à Salomon et que le Coran, lui aussi, célèbre dans sa Sourate XXVII". Jean Doresse, *L'Empire*, Vol. I, p. 34.

81. *AE* 3 (1959), pp. 107-108.

82. The well known Ethiopist, C. Conti Rossini in his book *Storia d'Etiopia*, attached a picture (pl. XXXIX) of ruins found at this site.

83. F. Anfray, "Aspects de l'archéologie éthiopienne": *Journal of African History* 9, 3 (1968), pp. 357-8.

of the highway, the Ethiopian Institute of Archaeology has unearthed a complex of buildings.

The site known as the tomb of Menelik I is found about 2 km. west of Aksum. The Deutsche Aksum-Expedition in 1906 cleared the site and discovered walls and room. From here the clergy of Aksum collected bones alleged to be Menelik I's and deposited them in the Aksum Sion Cathedral.

The most important of all is the shrine of the Ark of the Covenant or *Tabot*⁸⁴ which according to tradition, was brought to Ethiopia during the time of Solomon by the first born sons of the Israelites who accompanied Menelik I on his return from Jerusalem. Even today it is believed in Aksum that there is a special shrine for the Ark. The present one is decorated by a mosaic built by the late Empress Menen, the consort of Emperor Haile Selassie I. Hence Aksum is considered to be the second Jerusalem.⁸⁵ No one is allowed entrance to the shrine except one monk who is chosen and assigned to this service for life. When he dies, the clergy of Aksum choose another guardian who has a sound reputation for virtue and righteousness among the monks of northern Ethiopia. The monk is responsible for the burning of incense and cleaning of the shrine, and he is not allowed to leave the courtyard of the church.⁸⁶ He is the only person who can see the Ark (*Tabot*). In critical times he moves it to a safer place. During the persecution of Gudit in the 10th century, it was removed far to the south, to Lake Zuway, and after the period of the persecution it was brought back to Aksum. This happened again during the persecution of the Christians by Ahmed Gran in the 16th century.

In the Bible we have a description of the true Ark of the Covenant:⁸⁷ "And I (Moses) made an ark of shittim wood, and hewed two tables of stone like unto the first, and went up into the mount, having the two tables in mine hand". But in the Bible we do not have any concrete evidence about the fate of the Ark. It is quite certain that the Ark was not in the second Temple. Most probably it had been lost during the Babylonian captivity (605 B.C.) or before.⁸⁸ In the case of the Ark of Aksum it is just the contrary; it existed but we lack authentic descriptions of it. So far, the only person who claims that he has seen it, is an Armenian priest who came with Bishop Isaac as envoy of the Armenian Patriarch to the Court of Tewodros II. He says: "Alors un diacre, avec l'encensoir en main, s'approcha d'une caisse qu'il encensa, et nous présenta l'encensoir pour en faire autant. Cette caisse était un coffre travaillé aux Indes; quand elle fut ouverte, nous vîmes à découvert la Table des dix Commandements. Nous l'ôtâmes de sa place pour l'examiner plus attentivement. La pierre était de marbre d'une couleur rougeâtre, de l'espèce qu'on trouve ordinairement en Egypte; elle était de forme quadrangulaire, longue de 0^m, 24^c, sur une largeur de 0^m, 22^c et de 0^m, 03^c seulement en épaisseur. Elle était entourée sur les bords de fleurs gravées ayant un demi pouce de largeur environ; au milieu se voyait une seconde ligne quadrangulaire en forme de chaîne fine et dont l'espace intérieur était vide, tandis que l'espace compris entre les deux cadres contenait les dix Commandements, dont cinq étaient d'un côté et cinq de l'autre, écrits en biais à la façon des Turcs; au bas de la Table

84. Most likely a word borrowed from Jewish Palestinian *tebuta* which derived from Hebrew *tebah*, (Ullendorff, "Hebraic-Jewish elements", p. 233, n. 6).

85. Conti Rossini, *Liber Axumae*, p. 72 (text).

86. The present custodian of the Ark has held this office for over 35 years and remains in good health.

87. Deut. X: 1-5.

88. The final reference to the Ark is found in II Chronicles IX: 9. This book although written in post captivity times was drawn from an older source. Perhaps here the author quoted word for word from a passage of the previous source.

entre les deux cadres, figuraient trois lettres, ainsi qu'il se voit dans la figure qui suit".⁸⁹ The above description disqualifies it as the true Ark of the Covenant. But the question is whether Dimothéos really had seen the Ark. From his book we understand that the priests categorically refused to show it to him and for this reason he complained to *Dedjasmatch* Kassa, the future Emperor Johannes IV. A judicial hearing was begun which ended in favour of Dimothéos. Still the priests refused to show him the Ark. Finally, he was only allowed to see it in the presence of the Prince himself. During this time it would have been possible for the priest to substitute another Ark and present it to Dimothéos as the true Ark. Belief in the concept represented by the Ark is very deep-rooted in Ethiopia and even today in every church there is one Ark at least on the altar.⁹⁰

In Ethiopia the tradition of the Queen of Sheba is much stronger than in South Arabia. Here, she is revered as the founder of a new dynasty; there she is not considered to be an important personage. Here her life was linked with reality; there, with mythology. In Ethiopia this strong belief connecting Ethiopia with Israel can be traced to very early times. In the 6th century we find Caleb's son named 'Bete Israel'. A coin of the 7th or 8th century the bears legend of the 'King of Sion'. In the history of Cosmas II, Patriarch of Alexandria, we find a passage which relates that he sent a bishop to Ethiopia, which is the land of the Queen of Sheba. The Zagwé dynasty which came to power in Ethiopia for a time during the Middle Ages was not accepted by the clergy and people because it was not continuous with the old dynasty of Israel. These points serve to show that the Ethiopians cherish deep-rooted beliefs of great antiquity.

The position of a historian hardly differs from that of the common people. He cannot change the existing public opinion or belief if he has no proofs to offer. So we have to wait until we can find evidence before advancing new theories. The term *status quo* is preferred here because merely to destroy is not enough if nothing new is constructed. To leave ruins behind is easy, but to reconstruct is difficult. Let us not deny all the ancient traditions of Ethiopia if we are not able to put anything better in their place.

If we examine the Bible, we find many passages related to Ethiopia in the broad sense of the word. Among these, some of them are definitely about Ethiopia as its boundaries are today, but for historical reasons we cite these passages without distinguishing between their use of the word Ethiopia.

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| Numbers 12:1 | 'And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman'. |
| II Kings 19:9 | 'And when he heard say of Tirhakah King of Ethiopia, Behold, he is come out to fight against thee; he sent messengers again unto Hezekiah'. |
| II Chron 14:9 | 'And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots'. |
| II Chron 14:12 | 'So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled'. |
| II Chron 16:8 | 'Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the Lord, he delivered them into thine hand'. |

89. S. Dimothéos, *Deux ans de séjour en Abyssinie*, (Jerusalem, 1871), p. 141; Cf. *Ibidem*, *Zwei Jahre in Abessinien*, (Leipzig, without date), pp. 148-9.

90. J.M. Hanssens-A. Raes, "Une collection de tabots au Musée Chrétien de la Bibliothèque Vaticane": *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 17 (1951), pp. 435-450; Cf. Alvares, *The Prester John*, Vol. II, p. 543 ff.

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| Esther 1:1 | 'Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus which reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces:).' |
| Esther 8:9 | '...and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded unto the Jews, and the satraps and the governors and princes of provinces which are from India unto Ethiopia'. |
| Job 28:19 | 'The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it'. |
| Psalms 68:31 | 'Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God'. |
| Psalms 87:4 | '...behold Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there'. |
| Isaiah 11:11 | 'And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall remain from Assyria, and from Egypt and from Pathros, and from Ethiopia...'. |
| Isaiah 18:1 | 'Woe to the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia'. |
| Isaiah 20:3 | 'And the Lord said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia'. |
| Isaiah 20:4 | 'So shall the King of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt'. |
| Isaiah 20:5 | 'And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia...'. |
| Isaiah 37:9 | 'And he heard say concerning Tirhakah King of Ethiopia, He is come forth to make war with thee'. |
| Isaiah 43:3 | 'I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee'. |
| Isaiah 45:14 | 'Thus saith the lord, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee'. |
| Jeremiah 13:23 | 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?' |
| Jeremiah 38:7 | 'Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon...'. |
| Jeremiah 46:9 | 'Come up, ye horses; and rage, ye chariots; and let the mighty men come forth; the Ethiopians and the Libyans, that handle the shield; and the Lydians, that handle and bend the bow'. |
| Ezekiel 30:4 | 'And the sword shall come upon Egypt, and great pain shall be in Ethiopia'. |
| Ezekiel 30:9 | 'In that day shall messengers go forth from me in ships to make the careless Ethiopians afraid, and great pain shall come upon them, as in the day of Egypt: for, lo, it cometh'. |
| Daniel 11:43 | 'But he shall have power over the treasures of gold and of silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt: and the Libyans and the Ethiopians shall be at his steps'. |
| Amos 9:7 | 'Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? saith the Lord'. |
| Nahum 3:9 | 'Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite'. |
| Zephaniah 2:12 | 'Ye Ethiopians also, ye shall be slain by my sword'. |
| Zephaniah 3:10 | 'From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the |

daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering.'

According to Ethiopian tradition, there were commercial relations as well as cultural relations between Israel and Ethiopia. Ethiopian scholars say that their forefathers went frequently to Jerusalem to participate in the cultural activities of Israel. They translated the books of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Ge'ez. Whether Ge'ez developed into an independent spoken language before the birth of Christ is doubtful. But it is true that, according to scholars, the existing Ethiopic Old Testament was translated at different times. The translation is not from Hebrew but from the Septuagint.

When the Israelites were in exile, the tradition continues, the Ethiopians went there to comfort them. When that was not possible,⁹¹ they exchanged views by letter. This is what is believed in Ethiopia, but on the part of the Israelites, we do not have evidence concerning this matter. Also it is mentioned that the Ethiopian, Abemelech, slept without seeing the destruction of Jerusalem.

From a religious point of view especially, foreigners believe that there are still many Judaic elements in the Ethiopian Church: the observation of the Sabbath, the avoidance of eating the flesh of certain animals, etc. But these things are better regarded as habits and customs of a people rather than as connected with religious matters.⁹² In this connection the Jewish influence on the Ethiopian Church can be seen in the existence of the Ark in every church and the procession of it on different occasions. Even here, however, we see a strong Christian element in this practice.

Of course, Judaism had expanded in Ethiopia before Christianity. But it was not the official religion of the Empire as is stated in the *Kibre-Negest*. All the kings of Aksum, including Ezana in the 4th century, were pagans as the inscriptions and coins show us. We know from the inscriptions that Christianity was the successor of paganism.

Concerning Hebrew and Ge'ez, both are Semitic languages, the difference being that the first belongs to the northern group and the second to the southern group. Their common point concerns their origin. It is believed by Ethiopian scholars that the Hebrew language was known by the Ethiopians, but this does not seem correct. Even the Falashas who believe in Judaism do not possess the Pentateuch in Hebrew. All their literature is written in Ge'ez and their scholars do not speak Hebrew.

4. Ethiopia and the Graeco-Roman World

Geographical Links: This title is preferred because Ethiopia had direct relations with the Hellenistic world where the Greek language and Greek civilization in general expanded. The Greeks divided the world into two groups: Greeks and barbarians. The word barbarian itself in the beginning did not have a derogatory meaning. It signified only the man who was not Greek and did not speak Greek. When the Greeks first met with people whose civilization differed from theirs they could not identify the sounds of their speech and thought that they were repeating the sounds "Bar-bar-bar". So, from their speech, they named the speakers. Everyone who did not speak Greek was called a barbarian. In the beginning, this word was understood to mean stranger, but later it acquired the derogatory sense—uncivilized—that is, primitive in one's way of living. By contrast, the word Greek was connected with the idea of civilized man. A man

91. *Gedle Qewstas*, MS. National Library, Addis Ababa, pp. 66-67.

92. E. Ullendorff dealt extensively with this subject in his article, "Hebraic-Jewish elements": *op. cit.*, p. 228 ff.

who was born in Greece was automatically civilized, but this meaning was not long retained. In later times, the word became a common title for those who were not Greek by birth but had received Greek culture and education; they were also known as Hellenists. This concept of Hellenism became common just before the expedition of Alexander the Great to the East. Certain Greek philosophers were the theoretical architects of the universality of Greek civilization. Outstanding among these was Isocrates (436-338 B.C.) who maintained that Greeks were all those who received Greek culture. Non-Greeks who participated in the Greek culture were no longer considered barbarians. Ethiopia had relations with these Hellenized people of the Mediterranean world and at the same time the continental Greeks also knew about Ethiopia.

The ancient Greeks knew the continent of Africa by two names, Libya and Ethiopia.⁹³ When they spoke of Libya, they understood the whole region of North Africa westwards from Egypt. In the same way, they used the term Ethiopia to include the whole region of East Africa which lies south of Egypt. Here it can be said that in pre-classical times these countries were known in an ethnographic sense rather than a geographic one. Later when communications improved, knowledge about the countries of Africa gradually became clearer and more accurate.

Libya: The name is derived from the old inhabitants of this region, the Libu or Lebu. This tribe had settled in the area from the valley of the White Nile to the Gulf of Syrtis.⁹⁴ From the name of the tribe, the Greeks named the country. This included not only North Africa but also some known parts of West Africa. Later when the Romans occupied this place they discarded the name Libya which had been given by the Greeks. Instead, they named the region after another important tribe found in this area the *Aouriga*. The Romans named the country *Aouriga*, later *Awariga* and then finally adopted the name *Africa*.⁹⁵ So this region had two names, the Greeks calling it Libya and the Romans, Africa. The latter became the name for the continent and the former was limited to the region west of Egypt. Although the first men who established colonies in North Africa were the Phoenicians in 818 B.C., the Greeks also had a colony there in Cyrenaica, where Greek culture and philosophy flourished. From here Greek culture expanded to the territory which was occupied by the Phoenicians. In this way they came to know the Libyan territory well. When this region was later occupied by the Romans, a new colony was established under the name of "Provincia Africa". Of course, the boundaries of this colony on all four sides were exactly known.

Ethiopia: The word is derived from the Greek αἰθ- to burn and ὤψ face, which means the country of men with burnt faces. (The early Ethiopian chroniclers derived the word from Aethiops I, who is believed to have reigned approximately in the second millennium.) However, we find the expression used for the first time in Greek literature in the *Epics of Homer*. He mentioned it twice in the *Iliad* and three times in the *Odyssey*. In the *Iliad* he wrote: "Zeus went yesterday to Oceanus, to the blameless Ethiopians for a feast, and all the gods followed with him".⁹⁶ This would seem to indicate that the Ethiopians lived near the ocean. This is an indefinite piece of geographical information. In the *Odyssey* he defined in which direction this "ocean" was to be found. He wrote: "Howbeit Poseidon had gone among the far-off Ethiopians—the Ethiopians who dwell sundered

93. *RE*, XIII, 1, p. 149; G. Beardsley, *The Negro in Greek and Roman Civilization*, (London, 1929), p. 1 ff.

94. S. Gsell, *Histoire ancienne de l'Afrique du nord*, (Paris, 1929), Vol. V, p. 102.

95. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1956 ed.), Vol. I, p. 331. For the first time the word Africa appeared in a poem of Quintus Ennius (230-169 B.C.), the father of Roman poetry. (E.H. Warmington, *Remains of Old Latin*, Vol. I, (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1956), p. 114).

96. Homer, *The Iliad*, a, trans. A.T. Murray, (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1960), p. 432.

in twain, the furthestmost of men some where Hyperion sets and some where he rises."⁹⁷ "And further over Cyprus and Phoenicia and Egypt I wandered, and I came to the Ethiopians."⁹⁸ This is said about Menelaus, who on his return from Troy wandered and was carried to these countries by a storm. If we study these lines, we will see that the order of the geographical positioning is approximately correct. Then we can say that Homer placed Ethiopia south of Egypt and this is also right. In this case, the Ethiopians referred to in his poems were not a mythical people, but were a people who had already settled in a certain place in very ancient times.

The ethnography and geography of Ethiopia were not investigated until the time of Herodotus. Herodotus travelled throughout the Middle East and lived an especially long time in Egypt where he engaged in many discussions with the priests. From them, he heard many things concerning Ethiopia. According to the information which he obtained, he divided the country into two parts: Ethiopia near Egypt and Ethiopia southwards where the Troglodytae Ethiopians were living.⁹⁹ He also mentions the Macrobii or long-lived Ethiopians. From his description the location of this place seemed to be to the south of the Ichthyophages, i.e., in the region of present Ethiopia. According to the account of Herodotus, these people appear to have developed an advanced civilization; they had work, their handicrafts indicated progress and the people were generally believed to be well-disciplined.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, even at this period knowledge about Ethiopia was more ethnographical than purely geographical. The later geographers based their conclusions on the two earlier writers, Homer and Herodotus, but their knowledge improved greatly from the information which they obtained from other sources. Ethiopia was a source of interest to the ancient world for three reasons: the mystery of the tide of the Nile, the products of the country, and the elephant hunts which took place there.

The Nile overflows from June to the middle of September and leaves a great quantity of soil in Egypt. At this time in Egypt, it is the summer season. The overflowing of the Nile during this hot season made a great impression, especially on visitors to the area.¹⁰¹ For this reason the Greek philosophers and explorers who used to come to Egypt wanted to seek the explanation of this phenomenon. They often went to Syene (Assuan) and questioned the people who were travelling to Ethiopia either by the sea or by the land route to that far southward country. From personal experience or the information of merchants, they concluded that the Nile sprang from the foot of a great mountain which was covered by snow. During the summer season the sun melted the snow and then the Nile overflowed. But because the water was mixed with soil which it left on the shore, this answer did not satisfy them completely. So they travelled farther in an attempt to find the explanation. Of course, they did not find the source of the Blue Nile, but they learned much about Ethiopia, in which the Aksumite empire was also included.¹⁰²

As we have already mentioned, Ethiopia traded with Pharaonic Egypt in early times. This was known to the Ptolemies who replaced the Pharaohs of Egypt. In order

97. Homer, *The Odyssey*, i, pp. 22-23, (Loeb).

98. Homer, *The Odyssey*, iv, p. 84, (Loeb).

99. Herodotus, IV, 183.

100. Herodotus, III, 17; Strabo XVII, 789; O. Thomson, *History of Ancient Geography*, (Cambridge, 1941) p. 24.

101. *RE*, Vol. XXX, Col. 556 ff; J. Beaujeu, L. R. Nougier and M. Mollat, *Histoire universelle des explorations*, (Paris, 1955), p. 168; S. Sharpe, *The History of Egypt from the Earliest Times till the Conquest by the Arabs A.D. 640*, (London, 1905), Vol. I, p. 420 ff; E.H. Bunbury, *A History of Ancient Geography*, (New York, 1959), Vol. I, pp. 583-585.

102. Diodor, I, 37, 5.

to renew the old commercial relationship, they sent explorers to Ethiopia, and they brought back first-hand information about the country and the people.

The first Ptolemy, Soter (304-285 B.C.) who had served under Nearchus, showed a keen interest in Africa and sent an exploratory expedition to the coast of Africa under a certain captain, Philon.¹⁰³ The expedition was carried out successfully and on his return the captain described the whole journey in his book, *Aethiopia*,¹⁰⁴ but it has since been lost. Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.) devoted his time and efforts not only to exploration, but also to establishing new ports along the coast of northeast Africa, and in this connection the first expedition was one led by Ariston.¹⁰⁵ From the work which he wrote about the Nile, it seems quite clear that Ariston spent most of his time in the Valley of the Nile. Unfortunately his work is lost and our knowledge of it is based on a secondary source.¹⁰⁶ After Ariston most probably followed the expedition of Dalion. He went south of Meroë by land to explore the Nile and to study the people who were living on both sides of the river. In his exploration he included also the people of the coast of the Red Sea. His book, which is lost, became the basic source for Eratosthenes and other late geographers.¹⁰⁷ This fact indicates that the expeditions sent by Ptolemy Philadelphus included both the coastal and littoral region of northeast Africa. During his time Adulis and its adjacent coastal area were known, and the high plateau of Eritrea was an object of littoral exploration.¹⁰⁸ It is after this exploration that the Greeks succeeded in gaining access to and establishing their colony in this region. Ptolemy Euergetes (246-221 B.C.) continued the exploration and at the same time the exploitation of this region. He further established ports and commercial depots beyond Adulis, and, with the previous knowledge, he intensified commercial links. Among the explorers of this time, we mention only three who composed books which unfortunately are lost; Bion, Aristocreon, and Simonides. The latter spent more than five years in Meroë and Bion believed that he spent quite a long time in the northern region of present Ethiopia.¹⁰⁹

The third and last thing which contributed to the knowledge of Ethiopia in the ancient world was the fact that the country was a source for elephants. For the Ptolemies of Egypt, elephants were of great importance in war. They were considered as the tank is in our time. In the beginning elephants were imported from India, but because of the long distance they often died during the journey, and in addition were very expensive. Another disadvantage was that they could not be obtained quickly enough. So it was decided to send messengers to hunt elephants in Ethiopia and this became more frequent from the time of Ptolemy Euergetes. The fact has been confirmed by epigraphical and other evidence.¹¹⁰ According to Diodor, from the time of the second Ptolemy, Ethiopia was a country well-known to the Hellenistic world.¹¹¹ This is a somewhat exaggerated claim. It was only the beginning of knowledge about Ethiopia in its real geographical sense. Because of frequent contact, however, the knowledge of the

103. A. Tisserant, *Histoire de l'océan indien*, (Paris, 1961), p. 34; G. Ferrand, *Les Somalis*, (Paris, 1903), pp. 20-21.

104. *RE*, vol. XXIX, 51.

105. M. Rostovtzeff, "Foreign Commerce of Ptolemaic Egypt": *Journal of Economic and Business History*, 4 (1932), p. 741.

106. F. Susemihl, *Geschichte der Griechischen Litteratur in der Alexandrinischen Zeit*, 2 Vols., (Leipzig, 1892), Vol. II, p. 308.

107. *RE*, vol. VIII, 2022.

108. J. Beaujeu, et al., *Histoire universelle*, Vol. I, pp. 168-9.

109. Susemihl, *Geschichte*, vol. I, pp. 81, 664; J. Beaujeu, *Histoire*, p. 168.

110. See below, p. 52 ff.

111. Diodor, I, 37, 5.

later Greek authors and geographers was more accurate than before. But what new information they had acquired was not enough to eradicate the old beliefs about the country. They added new knowledge without correcting misconceptions of the past. This might be due to the fact that the greater part of the original books which were written by eye-witness observers were not taken into serious consideration, or because they wanted to attract their readers by including old and familiar ideas.

The geographer Strabo made use of the books of Eratosthenes and Agatharchides. According to the sources he used, the boundaries of Ethiopia were from the north, Egypt and more precisely Elephantine, where are the boundaries of Egypt and Ethiopia, to its outlets on the sea-coast,¹¹² from the south the land of Cinnammomophorus, i.e. Somalia. (This information is from Egyptian sources. Sestonis or Sewostris of the XII dynasty said that he travelled through Ethiopia to the land of Cinnammomophorus and returned home east from the Red Sea and west from Libya).¹¹³ Then Strabo divided Ethiopia into three parts: the kingdom of Candace, Upper Ethiopia and South Ethiopia.¹¹⁴

Diodor divides Ethiopia into two parts: Ethiopia near Egypt which means from the boundary of Egypt to Meroë, and from there down, west and south Ethiopia. This latter part contains the region of the two branches of the Nile and that of the Red Sea. From the south, the boundary of Ethiopia was not known to him.¹¹⁵

According to Pliny the boundary of Ethiopia in the north was Syene; in the east, the ocean; and in the west, Libya. He did not know the southern boundary. To his knowledge, "The conformation of Ethiopia spreads from south-east to south-west with its centre line running south".¹¹⁶ He describes the distance "from Meroë to Sirbitus 12 days' sail, from Sirbitus to the Dabelli 12 days' sail and from the Dabelli to the Ethiopic Ocean 6 days' journey by land."¹¹⁷

Since the knowledge of geography greatly improved in the later period, Ptolemy defines the boundary of Ethiopia in the complete sense of the word—from all sides. "Ethiopia, which is below Egypt, is terminated as we have indicated on the north, by Libya and Egypt; on the west by a part of interior Libya, along the meridian extending from Darnis to the southern terminus of Libya which is located in 51° 15 south, and 3° 90 on the south by the line leading from this terminus along the remaining part of the Aethiopia Interior to the Rhaptum promontory".¹¹⁸

These are the boundaries of Ethiopia according to the foremost Greek geographers. Here the name Ethiopia covers a vast area which includes the Sudan and the Aksumite kingdom. Besides the boundary demarcation, the attempt to discover the source of the Nile also contributed to a furthering of knowledge about Ethiopia. In this matter the geographers Diodor, Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy were well-informed. Diodor says that the river Nile springs from the foot of a great mountain in a remote part of Ethiopia. The length of the Nile from its source to its end is 12,000 stadien,¹¹⁹ and its three tributaries were not unknown to him.

¹¹² Strabo, *XVII*, 787.

¹¹³ Strabo, *II*, 120; *XVII* 820.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, *XVII*, 820, 789, 827.

¹¹⁵ Diodor, *III* 14, 6.

¹¹⁶ Pliny, *VI*, 35, 84.

¹¹⁷ Pliny, *VI*, 35, 197.

¹¹⁸ *Geography of Claudius Ptolemy*, trans. E.L. Stevenson, (New York, 1932), IV, 7, 1 (107).

¹¹⁹ "A stade of 600 Greek feet was in reality very nearly the 600th part of a degree; then stades are consequently just about equal to a nautical or geographical mile of 60 to a degree". E.H. Bunbury, *A History of Ancient Geography*, Vol. I., pp. 209–210.

Pliny also knew that the Nile had three tributaries; Astapus, Astaboras, and Astasobas "and where the river cuts through the middle of Ethiopia it has the name of Astapus, which in the native language means 'water issuing from the shades below'... the left-hand channel is called Astobores, (*sic*) that is 'branch of water coming out of the shades', and the right-hand channel Astusapes (*sic*), which means 'side branch'. It is not called Nile until its waters are again reconciled."¹²⁰ Astapus is identified with the Blue Nile, Astaboras with Atbara, and Astasobas with the White Nile. But he thought that it had its main source in western Ethiopia and the Nile is named at that point where the three branches unite.

Strabo's knowledge of the Nile is more accurate than that of the others. He says "The Nile flows from the Aethiopian boundaries towards the north in a straight line to the district called 'Delta'".¹²¹ He knew exactly the three branches: Astapus, Astaboras and Astasobas;¹²² and he believed that the Blue Nile sprang from a certain lake which was called Psebo (Lake Tana).¹²³ In this context, the view of Ptolemy differs slightly from Strabo's. In principle, he accepts that the Nile flows from a lake but according to him the name of this lake is Coloë. Apparently this derived from misinformation which he had received from merchants who had visited Coloë in northeast Ethiopia to trade.

Cities. These authors also mention some cities of Ethiopia which still exist today. Most of these cities were found in Upper Ethiopia, which is today called the Sudan, e.g. Pselchis, Napata and Meroë; and inland and near the coast of the Red Sea, Ptolemais, Berenice, Arsinoë, etc. But there are also cities in highland Ethiopia, the Aksumite kingdom, which are mentioned. Pliny knew three different Berenices across the Red Sea. One of these "a second town called Berenice which has the additional name of All-golden and a third called Berenice on the Neck, which is remarkable for its situation, being placed on a neck of land projecting a long way out, where the straits at the mouth of the Red Sea separate Africa from Arabia by a space of only 7½ miles".¹²⁴ Adulis was also known to him as a very large centre of Ethiopian trade. About this port, he says that it was "founded by slaves from Egypt who had run away from their masters".¹²⁵ Strabo does not mention Adulis, but he refers to "Berenice of Sabas" which he locates approximately at the same site as Adulis.¹²⁶ In this case it can safely be said that the term "Berenice of Saba" is identical with Adulis.¹²⁷ Ptolemy located Adulis in the right place on his map. Furthermore, he mentions two other inland cities, Coloë¹²⁸ and Aksum. About the latter he says "Axume, where is the king's palace."¹²⁹ He is the first among the geographers to mention Aksum as the capital city of Ethiopia.

The weakest point of the geographers from the second century B.C. to the second century A.D. is that they only describe the different ethnic groups of this region. The Greek authors knew these tribes not by direct acquaintance, but either from what they had heard from those people who came to Ethiopia to hunt elephants or from those who came here for commercial purposes. And those who came here for these purposes did not know the

¹²⁰ Pliny, *V*, 10, 53–54.

¹²¹ Strabo, *XVII*, 788.

¹²² *Ibid.*, *VII*, 321.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, *VIII*, 145.

¹²⁴ Pliny, *VI*, 33, 170. ed. H. Rockham, (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1952), p. 465, (version).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, *VI*, 173. H. Rockham translated the word Adulis, Freeman's town, *Ibid.*, p. 467.

¹²⁶ Strabo, *XVI*, 771.

¹²⁷ H. Kortenbeutel, *Der Aegyptische Süd und Osthandel* pp. 35–36.

¹²⁸ The word Coloë derives from Sabaeen and signifies "Fortress of Mountains". (C. Conti Rossini, *Notes sur l'Abyssinie avant les Sémites*, (Paris, 1920), p. 139; E. Glaser, *Die Abessinier*, p. 23.

¹²⁹ Ptolemy, *IV*, 7–8.

language. Therefore, their knowledge was not very profound. However, merchants from the Graeco-Roman world certainly came here frequently by land and sea and one can perhaps assume that the information contained at least a grain of truth. The Greek writers mentioned many names of different tribes of Ethiopia. These were not their true names but were usually given according to the way of life and diet of the group. It is very difficult today to identify these tribes. The main works on these ethnic groups in chronological order are by Eratosthenes (275–194 B.C.), Agatharchides (116 B.C.), and Artemidoros (100 B.C.) The works of the first and the last are lost but we have a partial knowledge of their content from Strabo's geography. The work of Agatharchides on geography is also lost, but we have his *De Mare Erythraeo*. Agatharchides says the Rhizophagi (root-eaters) lived south of Meroë along both sides of the Astaboras (Atbara).¹³⁰ Ptolemy thinks they were neighbours to the Aksumites.¹³¹ Another author, Aelianus (170–235 A.D.) also states that these tribes lived near the Astaboras, but he identifies them with Indians. This statement must be understood in the light of the confusion that the terms Ethiopia and India have already caused. As far as the daily life of these people was concerned, the Greeks described them as using stone tools for their needs.

Next to them (south) lived the Helophaghi (wood-eaters). As Agatharchides and Diodor said, these people ate fruit in summer and in winter the most delicate part of the trees. They were accustomed to jumping from one tree to another. Wives were shared communally.

Hunters (Kynegi): Their life was not very different from the above. They lived near the Helophagi. Strabo says that the country of the hunters was called *Endera*. Possibly this can be identified as Inderta in Tigre.¹³²

Dog-Tamers (Kynanogli): These people lived south of Kynegi. Their livelihood was also hunting; therefore, they kept dogs for this purpose.

Elephant-Eaters (Elephantophagi): West of Kynegi, this group lived by hunting elephants.

Noseless: (Simi): This group belonged to the family of Kynegi and they lived next to the Kynegi but farther south.

Ostrich-Eaters (Struthophagi): Also from the family of Kynegi, they differed only because they lived by hunting the ostrich.

Locust-Eaters (Acridophagi): These are the last tribe which lived far south in the interior of the country. They were a very weak race and their life span was short.

Along the coast lived other tribes, for example, the Ichthyophagi (fish-eaters), the Kreophagi (flesh-eaters), the Chelenophagi (tortoise-eaters), the Agriophagi (grass-eaters). The fish-eaters (Ichthyophagi) belonged to the class of Troglodytes. Herodotus¹³³ mentioned fish-eaters in his book and located them between Elephantine (Assuan) and the Red Sea. In fact he mentioned them in connection with the design of Cambyses to undertake an expedition against the Macrobian Ethiopians. Prior to the realization of this plan he sent Ichthyophagi to spy out the country. According to Diodor of Siculus (c.

130. GGM Vol. I, 141-2.

131. Ptolemy, IV, 7.

132. Conti Rossini, "Catalogo dei nomi propri di luogo dell'Etiopia": *Atti del primo Congresso Geografico Italiano*, (Genova, 1892), p. 25.

133. Herodotus, III, 20.

140 B.C.) "They go naked... and have their wives in common... and like other fish-eating people, they do not drink. They live in caves, tents of grass, under trees, or in holes dug in the sea moss".¹³⁴ On the other hand, the author of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* mentions flesh-eaters and calf-eaters. According to this author, their country was located east of Meroë on the coast of the Red Sea; and they were governed by local chiefs.¹³⁵ From these facts, A. Paul concludes "that the Beja of Dynastic and Ptolemaic times, and until even later, whether they be described as eaters of flesh, fish, locusts, or even of grass, were in the main a primitive pastoral people, dwellers in caves where such existed, and in shelters of grass or skins where they did not, and that Diodorus' description of them can be accepted as the best of contemporary accounts."¹³⁶ Except for the food and the physical characteristics of the above-mentioned tribes, the Greek writers knew nothing more of the life of the Ethiopians.

Generally speaking, the Greeks depict the inhabitants of Ethiopia as primitive. This is not altogether compatible with the description of the things they saw, and is probably written more for the amusement of their readers than for their enlightenment. On the one hand, they mention the cities in which commerce flourished and, on the other, describe the inhabitants as primitive. Although the later writers were in a position to know more about the people of Ethiopia, they simply copied the books which had been written three centuries before, without any comment or modification. Of course, we are not denying the fact that at that time there were primitive tribes; what we are saying is that they should also have mentioned the people who had reached a higher stage of development.

If we summarize what has been said: in the very beginning this country which we call Ethiopia today was only a part of the area known by the same name to the classical writers. These authors divided Ethiopia into two parts and this distinction was important because later the northern part was to become known as Nubia and the name Ethiopia was retained only for the region of the Aksumite Empire.

Political Relations

Alexander the Great was the first Greek king to conquer and subdue different countries of the east and expand his dominion as far as India. Greek culture thus began to penetrate into the east. From this time, the Hellenistic era began. If we follow the expedition of Alexander the Great from the African continent, we find that he conquered only Egypt and then passed on to Asia. Why he did not continue his expedition further south into Africa is a question still unanswered. Different theories can be advanced to account for this.

Alexander's expedition was not prompted by economic motives unlike most of the wars of the time, but rather because he wanted to demonstrate his military ability by conquering great kings. It may be that in Africa, except for Egypt, there was no great kingdom which was well-known to him, so he continued on his voyage to Asia.¹³⁷ Or perhaps it was because he knew the fate of Cambyses who had lost the majority of his soldiers in the desert and did not want to subject his army to the same fate. However, some writers men-

134. Diodor, III, 15; trans. A. Paul, *A History of the Beja Tribes of the Sudan*, (London, 1954), p. 35.

135. *Periplus*, 2-3.

136. A. Paul, *A History of the Beja Tribes of the Sudan*, p. 36.

137. Quintus Curtius, who wrote the history of Alexander the Great, says that the young monarch had in mind "to visit not only the interior of Egypt, but also Ethiopia". *History of Alexander the Great*, ed. and trans. J.C. Rolfe, 2 vols., (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1946), Vol. I, p. 237.

tion that when he was in Egypt, he sent some people to discover the source of the Nile.¹³⁸ Arrian, who wrote the complete history of Alexander's expeditions to the East, does not mention this fact, though he does mention that during Alexander's stay in Egypt the Ethiopians came to congratulate him on the occasion of his acclamation as the Emperor of Asia.¹³⁹ Either this or another event provided a basis on which to write an extensive history or rather develop a kind of literature which was more romantic than factual. John of Nikiou, a Christian writer who lived in the 5th century, mentions the relations between Alexander the Great and Ethiopia in his world history. He said that at that time there was a queen of Ethiopia named Candace. Alexander came to Ethiopia and was conquered by her love.¹⁴⁰

We find different texts in Ethiopia concerning Alexander the Great¹⁴¹ written in a lyrical rather than objective way. The Alexander romances in Ethiopia are of two kinds. The older ones were at least founded on some basis, on a considerable stratum of historical fact, largely obscured by layers of fiction. They might be termed "historical romances". The later writings contained very few historical facts and even these are lost in a maze of stories woven out of pure fantasy. Alexander the Great occupies an esteemed position not only in Ethiopian literature but also in ecclesiastical life. In the Ethiopian church he is considered a saint. One of the books of his life describes him as a saint and actually begins by saying: "In the name of God... we begin to write this book of the exploits of Alexander the King, the beloved of God; may his prayers and blessings be with him that loves him. Amen".¹⁴² His feast is observed on the 20th *az* (28 June), and his death is considered as the beginning of a new era, the era of Alexander which is still used as an alternative reckoning by some Ethiopians.

Foreign relations in the real sense were established during the time of his successors. After his death, his empire was divided into three parts. Egypt came under the rule of the Ptolemies who paid special attention to Ethiopia. They were not on good terms with the other two successors of Alexander. They needed elephants to defend themselves and to expand their territory. It has already been mentioned that elephants in those days were in the field of war what the tank is today. Elephants, imported into Egypt for this purpose, played a decisive role in Ptolemy's wars of expansion. The import of Ethiopian elephants was also of economic significance.

Elephant hunting was both well-organized and well-developed during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus. His primary policy was to regain the whole territory which was once under Egyptian rule and to establish friendly relations with the rest of northeast Africa. In both cases he was successful. He subdued Nubia and began to develop commercial relations south of Nubia, mainly in the coastal area. For better contact with this region, he cleared the canal which had been filled with sand, built a road from Berenice

138. "Alexander, greatest of Kings, was jealous of the Nile which Memphis worships and he sent chosen explorers through the utmost parts of Ethiopia, but they were stopped by the blazing zone of parched sky; they but saw the Nile steaming with heat". Lucan, *The Civil War*, ed. & trans. Duff, (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1938), p. 611.

139. "It is said that the Carchedonians also sent envoys, and that others came from Ethiopia". Arrian, *History of Alexander and Indica*, ed. and trans. E. Iliff Robson, 2 Vols., (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1933), Vol. II, p. 255.

140. *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiou*, trans. from Zotenberg's Ethiopic text, R.H. Charles, (London, 1916), p. 47; *Chronique de Jean évêque de Nikiou*, texte éthiopien, ed. Zotenberg, (Paris, 1883) p. 58.

141. *The Alexander Book in Ethiopia*, the Ethiopic versions of the Pseudo-Callisthenes, the *Chronicle of Al-Makin*, the Narrative of Joseph Ben Gorion A Christian Romance of Alexander, trans. Budge, (London, Oxford Press, 1933); *Idem*, *The Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great*, (London, 1896).

142. *The Life and Exploits*, p. 437.

to Coptos through the desert to the Nile and constructed many warships and transport vessels. It is believed that he had more than 4,000 ships for use in war and trade. To facilitate transportation of elephants and other commodities of northeast Africa, he established garrisons along the coast of the Red Sea and in the desert between Berenice and Coptos. The transport ships visited the African coast to exchange commodities with its inhabitants. This process was constant and peaceful.¹⁴³

Trade between Egypt and northeast Africa reached its highest point during the time of Ptolemy Euergetes (246-221 B.C.). From Papyri¹⁴⁴ we learn that a native of Berenice (a hunter) in his letter tells of the situation of elephant-hunters in the south, most probably in the region of Adulis. He describes how the hunters there found themselves in a difficult situation. They had finished their term of service and, while waiting for replacements, had run short of provisions because the elephant transport ship had been wrecked. He later indicates that the problem had been solved: that a transport ship called directly from Heroönpolis and that the men who would replace the hunters in Ethiopia were ready for departure.¹⁴⁵ As Agatharchides indicates, the Ptolemies had concluded an agreement with the local people to supply their representative with live elephants.¹⁴⁶ These live elephants were transported by ship to Berenice and from there by land to Coptos where there was a special garrison whose main task was to control the customs duty on the goods which were transported by caravan. The officer of this company had the privilege of corresponding directly with the king himself. The main depot for the elephants was at Thebes.¹⁴⁷

Of course, elephants did not constitute the only import from the south. Other commodities included "one hundred and thirty Aethiopian sheep; three hundred Arabian, twenty Euboean, also twenty-six Indian oxen entirely white, eight Aethiopian [oxen], one large she-bear, fourteen leopards, sixteen panthers, four bynxes, three panther cubs, one giraffe, one Ethiopian rhinoceros."¹⁴⁸ Callixenus of Rhodes describes the parade that took place in Alexandria during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus: "Then were brought in cages, parrots, peacocks, guinea fowl, birds from the Phasis and from Ethiopia in great quantities".¹⁴⁹ An eye-witness account reveals that the Ethiopians themselves, with Greek hunters, used to bring the products of their country to Alexandria: "next to these were negro (Ethiopians) tributebearers, some of whom brought six hundred tusks, others 2,000 ebony logs, others sixty mixing bowls full of gold and silver, coins and gold dust".¹⁵⁰

Further evidence of elephant hunting was found in an inscription on Ptolemy's throne which was erected at Adulis. This is known as the *Monumentum Adulitanum* among scholars. The inscription begins: "Ptolemy son of king Ptolemy and Queen Arsinoë, twin gods"; later, it is stated of his kingdom that his dominion expanded in Africa and Asia, and that he "made an expedition into Asia with forces of infantry and cavalry, and a fleet of elephants from the Troglodytes and Ethiopia, animals which his father and himself were the first to capture by hunting in those countries, and which they took down to

143. Kortenbeutel, *Der Aegyptische Süd und Osthandel*, p. 16 ff; C. Préaux, *L'Économie royale*, pp. 37-40, 356-359; M. Rostovtzeff, "Foreign Commerce", pp. 739-744.

144. *Papyri Petrie II*, XL=III, LXII.

145. Rostovtzeff, "Zur Geschichte", p. 303.

146. *GGM I*, p. 147.

147. Rostovtzeff, "Zur Geschichte", p. 305.

148. Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, ed. and trans. Gulick, (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1928), Vol. II, p. 411.

149. *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, 251.

150. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, 411.

Egypt, where they had them trained for employment in war".¹⁵¹ Aside from this, a Greek inscription was left by an Ethiopian king which dealt with his achievement in the field of war. The original of this inscription was lost long ago, but we can find a copy of it in *The Christian Topography* of Cosmas. An interesting point here is the use of the geographical name, Ethiopia. This term is mentioned here in a purely geographical sense and the area is located south of the Troglodytae which would seem to refer to the Aksumite Empire exclusively.

During the reign of Ptolemy Philopator (221–204 B.C.), commerce expanded further south to the Horn of Africa. Strabo mentions the captains under whose leadership this expedition was sent and the new ports founded by them. A certain Lichas, Strategos and Pythangelos had been sent to hunt the elephants in the south. But they had proceeded further south and founded other commercial centres along the coast as far as the Horn of Africa, the better to exploit the products of this region, particularly spices and aromatic herbs.¹⁵² This information is testified to by evidence from papyri. These papyri also refer to another captain, Charimortos, of equal importance with the other three captains.¹⁵³ Lichas, Strategos and Pythangelos. In later times, it seemed that commerce was of more importance than elephant hunting. In the inscription of Euergetes II (145–116 B.C.) dated 130 B.C., the reference is to commodities of northeast Africa only, and he increased the number of the garrison from Berenice to Coptos for reasons of security.¹⁵⁴

The commercial activities of the Ptolemies were so far limited to the basin of the Red Sea, northeast Africa on the west side, and Arabia on the east; they did not extend as far as India. Indian trade was being conducted through the Persian Gulf. But during the reign of Ptolemy Soter II (116–80 B.C.), things began to change. Hippalus, a Greek mariner, having observed the regularity of the monsoons, was the first to take advantage of them and venture to steer a direct course from the promontory of Syagrus (Cape Farak)¹⁵⁵ in Arabia to the coast of India. This enterprise has been praised by modern writers and Schoff goes as far as to say, "Hippalus deserves as much honour in Roman annals as does Columbus in modern history."¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, this event did not affect trade with Ethiopia. Ptolemy Soter II continued his relations with Ethiopia and the importance of Adulis doubled from that time. In addition to its previous role, it became the depot of goods from the Far East. This is why Cleopatra later decided to send her son Caesarion to India via Ethiopia. On the way Caesarion was captured and slain by Octavian.¹⁵⁷

Among the countries of northeast Africa, the area of present-day Ethiopia had a special position in relations with the Hellenistic world. Here, contact was not limited to trade; Greek culture also developed. It is most likely that the Greek community in Ethiopia during the Ptolemaic times was quite large and exercised considerable influence within the country. It was at that time that the Greek culture became more widespread and, as a result Greek became a literary language of Ethiopia. Inscriptions were produced in Greek, and on the Aksumite coins the legends were engraved in Greek. In addition, Greek gods were known to the Ethiopians and hence the worship of Zeus, Poseidon, Ares and others was practised. In the field of art and architecture, however, we

151. McCrindle, *The Christian Topography*, pp. 57–58.

152. Strabo, XVI, 796; Kortenbeutel, *op. cit.*, pp. 37–38; Rostovtzeff, "Zur Geschichte", p. 302.

153. *Pap. Petrie* III, IX, 12; *Pap. Hib.* 71; 18.

154. Kortenbeutel, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

155. E.H. Bunbury, *A History of Ancient Geography*, Vol. II, p. 351.

156. Schoff, *The Periplus*, p. 6.

157. P.G. Elgood, *The Ptolemies of Egypt*, (Bristol, 1938), p. 230.

do not know the extent of Greek influence. Although there are some indications in Aduli and Coloë, generally it can be said that the contribution of the Greeks in the field of art and architecture was minimal. The penetration of the Greek language, however, marks an important new development in Ethiopian history in the sense that Greek influence was the second element after South Arabian which contributed greatly to the development of the Aksumite civilization.

When the Romans succeeded the Greeks in this region, they decided to include Ethiopia under their authority. This was in the time of Augustus Caesar. In 29 B.C. an armed force was sent to subdue Ethiopia and Arabia. The *causa belli* was principally connected with trade. Commerce had flourished during the Ptolemies' time. Ethiopian products were well-known even in Rome, where the reign of Augustus marked the beginning of an era of luxury and good living. The old Roman simplicity declined, or rather, it was limited to the lower class. Now there was a distinct difference between the upper and lower classes. To provide for the opulence that the new way of life demanded, Roman found Oriental products were absolutely necessary. Of these products, the Ethiopian ones had first place. But Roman relations with any one country could not be limited to commerce alone. Every country which had any connection with Rome found itself subordinated to her and recognized her supremacy. It was not possible or permissible for a country to be independent and have friendly relations with Rome. This was the policy followed by Roman Emperors of the first century. Concerning Ethiopia and Arabia, the interest of Rome was not only political but also economic. As stated above, these two countries exported their products to the Mediterranean world, a matter of prime importance. The subordination of these countries was an immediate necessity for the prosperity of Rome. Therefore, a Roman legion was sent to Ethiopia. It was an infantry unit which was destined for service further to the south. The Roman legion was a good fighting unit on land, but poor at sea.

This army set out for Ethiopia, but it had first to conquer the countries which lay in its path between Egypt and the Aksumite Empire. En route, it came to Napata, the seat of the great kingdom under Egyptian influence.

The commander of the Roman legion, Aelius Gallus, invaded Napata first with his infantry and horsemen. The inhabitants of the city could not resist long, because the Roman army was well-equipped and it was also more experienced than the Napatians in military affairs. So the latter left the city and fled to the mountains. Besides Napata, the Romans occupied many other cities. In the city of Philae the Romans erected a stele with Egyptian, Latin, and Greek inscriptions to commemorate their victory over the Napatians. In the meantime, the Napatians sent ambassadors to Philae to conclude peace with the Romans. Both sides wished to secure peace. The Romans proposed that the Napatians recognize Augustus as their supreme sovereign and pay tribute to Rome. On the other hand, the Napatians would be free to conduct their internal affairs without interference and, except for a small detachment to protect the tax collectors, the Roman legion would evacuate Napatian territory. On these terms the Romans withdrew from the country. However, this agreement was a kind of *modus vivendi*. It did not fully satisfy either party. Each was watching for a good opportunity to break it and achieve their main purpose by military means.

The Romans had, moreover, to fight in Arabia; so they did not want to expand their forces in Ethiopia. The Napatians on the other hand, were obliged to accept these conditions because they were not well-prepared for war. The agreement lasted until they had strengthened their forces. About four years later they thought that they were in a position to defeat their enemy and they proclaimed war against the Romans. They

occupied three cities: Syene, Elephantine and Philae. They overthrew the statue of Augustus, and took booty and prisoners. The Prefect of Egypt was no longer Aelius Gallus, but Petronius. When he heard the news of the Napatian attack, action was taken, as related by Strabo, and he marched against them with a force of 10,000 men and 8,000 horsemen. Strabo was a personal friend of Petronius, and doubtless exaggerated the number of troops involved. Even the whole force could not have been 10,000. However, the number in his army destined for Napata was considerable. The Napatians were unable to resist the Romans, and were forced to retire. In Pselchis they began to negotiate with the Romans. This time the Romans were more demanding. Before starting negotiations they wanted to know the reason for the Napatian rebellion. The Napatians retorted that they were being harmed by the tax collectors and were therefore obliged to rebel. They did not consider their action as being against the Roman Empire, but as revenge against the tax collectors. Of course, this was a prevarication, because the destruction of Augustus' statue had nothing to do with tax collectors. This explanation did not satisfy the Romans, and they demanded the restoration of the statue of Augustus, but the Napatians were not willing to do this. Therefore, negotiations were interrupted after three days and the fighting was renewed. The superior fighting skill of the Romans soon obliged the Napatians to retreat. They lost great numbers of their forces and the rest withdrew to the city of Primis which was located in the desert. Petronius had no difficulty in occupying this city and then he continued his march to Napata where the seat of Queen Candace was located. Strabo describes this queen as a "brave woman with one eye". For the second time Petronius proposed a truce on condition that the Napatians release the prisoners and restore the statue of Augustus. When he received a negative reply, he attacked and occupied the city. The houses of this city were burnt and destroyed and the inhabitants were enslaved. After that he returned to Primis where he fortified the city and posted a garrison of four hundred, with a food supply sufficient for four years. Then he returned to Alexandria. From there he sent 1,000 slaves to Rome for Augustus. Two years later Queen Candace attacked Primis. The garrison which was there asked for help from Alexandria. Petronius hastened to Primis and the Napatian attack failed. Now the Napatians sent ambassadors to Samos, where Augustus was staying, to negotiate directly with him. The Napatians succeeded in freeing themselves from the tax, but the garrison was not removed and remained there for another three centuries without any disturbance.¹⁵⁸

The Romans did not want to or could not invade the region which lay to the south beyond Meroë. This was because they had not established their authority in the occupied territory of the kingdom of Napata, and with the end of the Augustan period, Roman expansion was halted. The Romans now wanted to consolidate what they already occupied. In this way, the Aksumite kingdom was delivered from the Roman occupation which had been the Romans' first aim.

However, the Roman hope of retaining this area as part of her empire did not die entirely. The well-known Roman writer, Seneca, gives us some indication of the policy of Nero concerning Ethiopia. During the reign of Nero (54-68 A.D.) an expedition was sent to Ethiopia to discover the source of the Nile and this mission was

supplied with a letter to the king of Ethiopia. Nero had been brought up and educated by Seneca. Later when Nero became emperor, Seneca was his adviser. Therefore, he knew the main purpose of this expedition to Ethiopia, although he restricted himself to saying that the expedition was sent to explore the source of the Nile:

I myself heard from their own lips the story told by the two non-commissioned officers sent to investigate the source of the Nile by our good emperor Nero, a monarch devoted to virtue in every form, but especially solicitous for the interests of truth. The King of Ethiopia had supplied them with assistance and furnished letters of introduction to the neighbouring Kings, and so they had penetrated into the heart of Africa and accomplished a long journey. "We came indeed" I give their own words, "to huge marshes, the limit of which even the natives did not know, and no one else could hope to know; so completely was the river entangled with vegetable growth, so impassable the waters by foot, or even by boat, since the muddy overgrown marsh would bear only a small boat containing one person. There", my informant went on, "we saw with our eyes two rocks, from which an immense quantity of water issued". Now whether that is the real source or only an addition to the river, whether it rises there or merely returns to the surface after its previous course underground; don't you think that, whatever it is, that the water comes up from a great lake in the earth?¹⁵⁹

About the same expedition, Pliny says: "But all this discrepancy has recently been ended, inasmuch as the expedition sent by Nero to explore the country have reported that the distance from Syene to Meroë is 945 miles".¹⁶⁰ The scientific character which has been given to this expedition by both authors does not seem to have been Nero's real intention.

This emperor was more inclined towards luxury and glory than wisdom. He knew that the region of Ethiopia was an important source of supply of the products needed to maintain his luxurious style of living. Therefore, the envoys could not merely have been entrusted with a mission similar to that of Cambyses' embassy, i.e., to spy on the country and later to send military forces to conquer it. So, after he had received enough information, he began to prepare for war. This plan was revealed perhaps unintentionally by Pliny and Dio Cassio. The former says, "...Nero, when among the rest of his wars he was actually contemplating an attack on Ethiopia, reported that there was nothing but desert",¹⁶¹ and the latter, "Nero, though angry with him did not sail against him (the Parthian king) nor yet against the Ethiopians or the Caspian Gate".¹⁶² According to Pliny the emperor gave up his original plan to attack Ethiopia after he had received reports on the country. However, Dio Cassio indicates that Nero still maintained the idea of undertaking an expedition against the Ethiopians. In the light of other relevant sources, the latter seems to be rather more correct. As Josephus states, Nero had already dispatched an army to Ptolemais. "Meanwhile Titus, after a swifter passage from Achaia to Alexandria than is usual in the winter season, had taken command of the forces which he had been sent to fetch and by a forced march, soon reached Ptolemais".¹⁶³ He joined with his father Vespasian who was already there with his army. The plan was to be abandoned only

158. *Res Gestae divi Augusti* (Monumentum Ancyranum) V. 26; Strabo XVII, 280; Pliny VI, 35, 181; Dio Cassio, *Hist.* LIV 5-6; H. George Lyons and L. Berhardt, "Eine neue Trilingue Inschrift von Philae": *Sitz. Ber. Königl. Preuss. Ak. Wiss.* (Berlin, 1896), pp. 469-474; A. Vogliano, *Un papiro storica greco della raccolta milanese e le campagne dei Romani in Etiopia*, (Milano, 1940); *Cambridge, Ancient History*, Vol. X, pp. 239-247; R. Hennig, "Aelius Gallus Feldzug in Arabien", *Terrae Incognitae*, Vol. I, (1944), pp. 301-311; Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Storia della Nubia cristiana*, (Rome, 1938) pp. 7-12; *Idem.*, *La Nubia romana*, (Rome, 1941) pp. 1 ff.

159. J. Clarke, *Physical Science in the Time of Nero, being a translation of the Quaestiones Naturales of Seneca*, (London, 1910), pp. 235-236.

160. Pliny, VI, 35, 184, ed. H. Rackham, (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1947), p. 475.

161. Pliny, VI, 35, 81.

162. Dio Cassio, LXII, p. 8.

163. Josephus, *Jewish War* II, p. 64.

if there were a Jewish revolt in Jerusalem.¹⁶⁴ The question is, who was this king, as Seneca presents him, who was independent and who supplied the Roman envoys with letters of recommendation? For the reason which has already been mentioned, Meroë cannot be considered. On the other hand, the Romans would not have made large-scale preparations for a country which was already conquered and tributary. As W. Schur says, the war was intended to be directed against the Aksumite emperor.¹⁶⁵

164. *Ibid.*, III, 115.

165. W. Schur, "Die Orient politik des Kaisers Nero"; *Klio* 25 (1923), pp. 40-45; L.P. Kirwan, "Rome Beyond the Southern Egyptian Frontiers"; *Geographical Journal* 123, (1957), pp. 16-17; J.G. Milne, *A History of Egypt under the Roman Rule*, (London, 1924) pp. 21-25.

CHAPTER II

THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE AKSUMITE CIVILIZATION

1. Pre-Aksumite Culture

The history of ancient peoples is hidden in the remote ages. The historian follows their traces with a hope of finding their origin. But the farther back he goes, the darker the path becomes. Ethiopia as an ancient country is no exception.

We speak of the Aksumite Empire because Aksum, as capital of the state, was the cultural, economic and commercial centre of the Empire, like Rome in the Roman Empire.

As sources for the history of the Aksumite Empire, we find inscriptions in three languages: Sabaeen, Greek and Ge'ez. The Sabaeen language was once the spoken language of the Empire. In various places in northern Ethiopia we find South Arabian inscriptions written from right to left and from left to right in alternate lines, which is called Boustrophedon. About five kms. east of Aksum on the hill which is known as *Abba Penteléwos* today, there is a Sabaeen inscription in a fragmentary condition. Here can still be read however, "they occupied the eastern DMT."¹ Who these people were who occupied DMT and for what reason we are not yet in a position to know. What we can assume is that the occupation of a certain place demands an organized people who have a leader. The inscription was also a dedication to God for the victory by a certain war leader, i.e. not a king. That is also evidence of political organization in Ethiopia. In connection with DMT, we have more details from the inscription of Enda Cerqos, not far from Melazo. It speaks of the eastern and western parts of this region and of its inhabitants, both red and black.² Another inscription from the same region deals with the constitutional status of DMT. It had its own *Mukarrib* and the names of two kings are mentioned "LMN *mlkn sr'n*, of the tribe of *yg'd mkrb* of D'MT and of SB', son of RBH *mlkn*, have restored and renewed the oratory of the idols of his house, when..."³ The same king is mentioned in the inscription found at Matara, "...and DT-B'DN and by SMH'LY and by LMN their lords."⁴

In Yeha the German expedition found some fragments of Sabaeen inscriptions on which can still be read some tribal names and gods.⁵ In the same place, in 1955, an altar was found with Sabaeen inscriptions. The following is a translation of the rendering proposed by A. Caquot and A.J. Drewes: "...H MLKN (of the family of) SR'N, of the tribe of YG'D, *mkrb* of D'MT and SB', descendant of the tribe W'RN of (the region

1. *DAE*, vol. IV, p. 1.

2. R. Schneider, "Inscriptions d'Enda Cerqos": *AE* 4 (1961), p. 62.

3. *Idem*, "Remarques sur les inscriptions d'Enda Cerqos": *AE* 6 (1965), p. 221; See also *Idem*, "Inscription d'Enda Cerqos": p. 62. ff.

4. *Idem*, "Notes épigraphiques sur les découvertes de Matara": *AE* 6 (1965), p. 90.

5. *DAE*, vol. IV, p. 59.

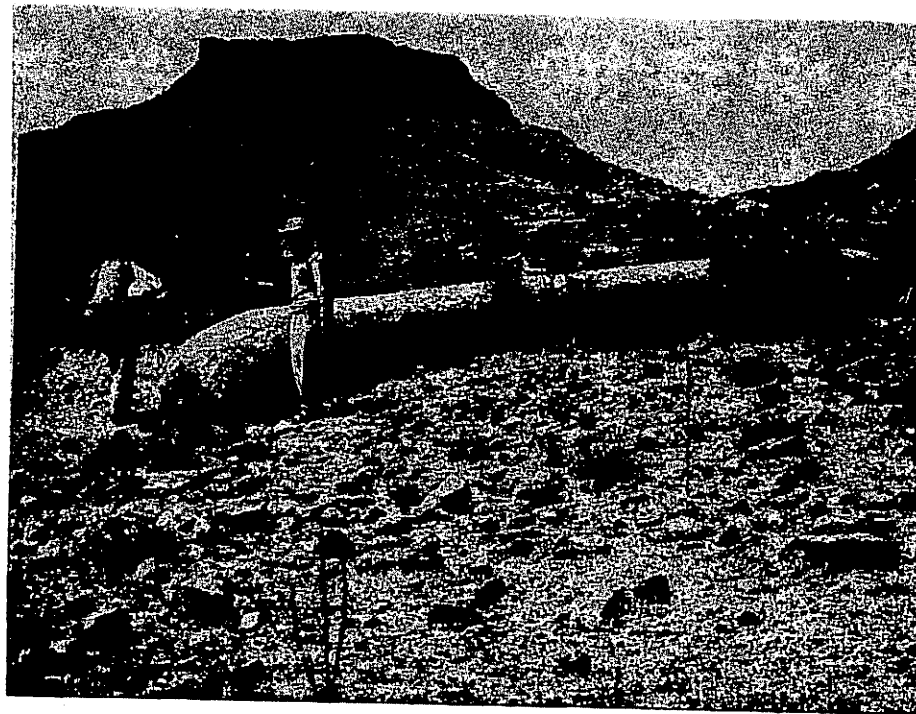
of) RYDN, dedicated [this altar?] to 'LMQHY, lord of QD [JR, when they renewed [...and when?] they seized the booty of D'MT, both in the East and in the West [...and they consecrated themselves and their allies (?) and their wives [...and their houses and their fields...".⁶ The location of DMT is not clear from this inscription. Apparently the inhabitants had families and houses with farms. In other words, the inhabitants were people who had settled down permanently under the rule of their sovereign. They worshipped the principal god of South Arabia, Almouqah, and had allies to face the enemy who eventually declared war against them.

In 1956 in the excavations at the site of Melazo, a number of Sabaeen inscriptions in fragmented condition were unearthed, which speak about LHY of the family FQMM and about altars dedicated to Almouqah.⁷ Here also was found the ruin of a temple dedicated to the same deity, Almouqah. The inscriptions have been dated by A.J. Drewes who classifies them in Group I which means that they were documents left by the immigrants from South Arabia to Ethiopia. The date of these inscriptions, according to palaeographical evidence, belongs to a period a little earlier than 450 B.C.⁸

The inscription at Kaskase is also very interesting. In it, reference is made to the people being ruled by a king.⁹ These inscriptions from Aksum, Yeha, Enda Cerqos near Melazo, Matara and Kaskase are similar in content. In most of these inscriptions we find DMT and WRN. From this, it is possible to conclude that they are speaking about the same tribes and places. From palaeography and the content, we can conclude that even if they were not written during the reign of the same king, they were written in the time of the same dynasty. Therefore, the region from Aksum to Kaskase can be assumed to have been under a certain king. With the help of palaeography, we can date these inscriptions. According to the experts, the Boustrophedon way of writing belongs to the end of the sixth century B.C.

Concerning the chronology of Sabaeen inscriptions in Ethiopia, some scholars supposed that the earliest had been written in the seventh century B.C., but today according to palaeographical evidence the earliest date of these inscriptions, especially that of Yeha, is from the fifth century B.C.¹⁰

Besides this, we find ruins of palaces, temples, gravestones, thrones and monolithic monuments like the stelae of Aksum. The longest stelae in the world, 33 metres in height, was found here. When and why this kind of monument was erected is not yet known. On the stelae, except for some decorative forms, there is no trace of any inscription. Therefore, we cannot date them. There are different opinions about these stelae of Aksum. Some think that they represent a further development of the Menhir, others believe them to be a kind of monument of Asiatic origin.¹¹ As to the purpose of these stelae, opinions also differ. Some believe that they had religious significance, i.e., that they were erected for the sun-god. Others say they were the graves of the kings. According to archaeological evidence, the latter opinion seems most probable.¹² There is no unanimity of opinion either about the art or forms of the architecture. Some of those who have examined the



The stele of Kaskase.

Photo: Serge

6. A. Caquot et A.J. Drewes, "Les monuments recueillis à Maqallé": *AE* 1 (1955), p. 32.

7. A.J. Drewes, "Les inscriptions de Melazo": *AE* 3 (1959), p. 90 ff.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

9. *DAE*, vol. IV, p. 62.

10. J. Pirenne, "La Grèce et Saba, une nouvelle base pour la chronologie sud-arabe": *Mémoires présentés par divers savants à l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres de l'Institut de France*, Tome XV, 1955, p. 141.

11. D. Krencker, *Aeltere Denkmäler Nordabessinien*: *DAE*, vol. II, p. 30.

12. *Ibid.*

obelisks of Egypt think that they were the product of this art.¹³ Others relate them to the old Indian temples and believe that they were of Indian inspiration.¹⁴ We do not find this kind of stelae in South Arabia.¹⁵ Any existing ones are very small. The examples at Aksum are more or less similar to Egyptian obelisks in length, but they differ in technical details. For example, the Egyptian obelisks have inscriptions written mostly from bottom to top, but none of the long Aksumite stelae in Ethiopia have inscriptions. It is difficult to believe that those people who possessed so much technical talent were illiterate or without an alphabet. We know that, at least from the fifth century B.C., the Sabaeo alphabet was in use in this country. Of course, the absence of inscriptions on stelae cannot be taken as a general principle in Ethiopia, for we have inscriptions on the stelae of Matara.

We have no evidence about the date of these stelae. The Greek writers who visited Aksum did not give any information on this point. Even Cosmas, who visited Aksum and gave some details about the imperial palace, did not mention anything about them. It can be roughly estimated that they were produced before the time of Christ.¹⁶ It is interesting to note that these stelae were concentrated in the city of Aksum. We find three types: those which were well-made and decorated, those which were half-completed and those which were not hewn at all, but were simply megaliths. The best examples have crumbled and fallen down in many places. There is a group of five stelae, the largest one in the centre and two smaller ones on either side. From here moving eastward, we find many scattered stelae. According to the *Book of Aksum* there were altogether 50 stelae in Aksum.¹⁷

The technique of construction is very interesting. They were erected at the foot of a hill which was dug out and made level. Then the ground was built up to make it firm. There are two basements: one at a distance of about four metres, the other just around the stelae in the form of a great flat cut stone.¹⁸ The plan worked in the case of the small stelae, but the giant stele, although properly supported, was too heavy to remain standing for long. The Ethiopian tradition, however, attributes the fall to the destructive work of Queen Gudit in the tenth century of our era. In erecting the stelae, most probably the Ethiopians employed the Egyptian method for raising obelisks. If this is so, it implies a certain link with Egyptian art and techniques. The Ethiopian tradition which is fond of attributing the masterpieces of the country to foreigners refuses to do so in the case of the stelae. They are believed to be the work of Ethiopians who used a special implement called *ḥḥṭ ṣṣṣ*.

Generally speaking, although we lack adequate information about the aim, date and techniques involved in building the stelae, they have great significance for Aksumite history. In a way they are the symbol of the Aksumite civilization. And, in particular, the style of these stelae exercised a deep and enduring influence on the development of Ethiopian architecture.

13. B. Playne, "Suggestions on the Origin of the «False Doors» of the Axumite Stelae": *AE* 6 (1965), pp. 279-280; U. Monneret de Villard states, "I monoliti di Aksum portano ancora le tracce della loro lavorazione, e del modo di estrazione. Se ne può trarre la conclusione che furono cavati col lo stesso metodo degli obelischi egiziani". *Aksum ricerche di topografia generale*, (Roma, 1938), p. 39.

14. W. H. Schoff, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, pp. 64-65.

15. O. Krencker, *Aeltere Denkmäler*, p. 30.

16. O. Krencker places the date of the erection of the stelae at the climax of power, 1st-4th century A.D., *Aeltere Denkmäler*, p. 30.

17. *Liber Axumae*, ed. Conti Rossini, *CSCO*, *Scriptores Aethiopici*, Tome 24, (Paris, 1954), p. 3 (text). To the east of Adua, there is a place called Hinzat, where a good number of stelae can be seen.

18. According to local tradition the Aksumite stelae were made there and transported to Aksum.

18. J. Leclant, "Les fouilles à Axoum en 1955-56": *AE* 3 (1959), p. 4 ff.

2. Proto-Aksumite Culture

The second important stage in the development of Aksumite culture was the introduction and widespread use of the Greek language in Ethiopia. A new outlook and concept of the country now emerged which modified the previous ideas and ways of thinking without effacing them. The combination of Semitic and Greek cultures one finds in Ethiopia is quite remarkable. When the Greek language was used by the people their identity remained unchanged in character or essence. The same happened when Sabaeans or Ge'ez was used: this is best illustrated when we read the text of the inscription of Adulis. The original has been lost long ago, but we find a copy of it in the book called the *Christian Topography*, written by Cosmas Indicopleustes (Sailor of the Indian Sea) who came as a visitor to Ethiopia about 525 A.D.

At that time the Emperor of Ethiopia, Caleb, ordered the governor of Adulis to copy the inscription and send it to him at Aksum. Then the governor, whose name was Abbas, called on an Alexandrian Greek named Menas, a merchant by profession, to accomplish this task. By chance, Cosmas, who was there at that moment, was called on to assist in the copying. Cosmas retained one copy for himself and the other was given to the governor of Adulis. Obviously the copy then was dispatched to Caleb; but it has not been found because of the later destruction of the city. The only copy we have is the one made by Cosmas.¹⁹ It is unfortunate that Cosmas,²⁰ because of an eye disease, was not in a position to decipher the first few lines at the beginning where the name of the king and his title are mentioned. The author of this inscription, therefore, remains anonymous.²¹ The content of this inscription as translated by Budge is as follows:

"... and having commanded the peoples who lived near to me to keep the peace, I waged war fiercely and overthrew the following peoples. I fought the Gaze people, then the Agame and the Signyn, and when I had vanquished them I set apart the one half of their possessions and of their inhabitants as my share. Having crossed the Nile, I overthrew Ava and the Zigarine, and Agave, and Tiama and the Athagauss, and the Kala, and the Semine, a people who live on the other side of the Nile, among inhospitable mountains that are covered deeply in snow, having frozen snowdrifts everywhere, and deep snow in which men sink up to their knees. Then I overthrew the Lasine, and the Zea, and the Gavala, who live in a range of mountains, from the sides of which springs of hot water gush forth and pour down the sides of the mountains. Then I overthrew Atalmo, and the Bega, and all the people who camp round about them. And having overthrown the Taggaitai, who occupy the country as far as the frontier to Egypt, I turned away from my own territories and marched to Egypt. Then I fought with the Annine and the Matine, who live on precipitous mountains, and the people of Sasu, who had fled to a very high and impassable mountain. I camped round about them and made them prisoners, and I took what I wished for of their young men and young women, and their youths and maidens, and all their possessions. I overthrew the peoples of Rausoi, who live in districts in the interior with the Barbarians who traffick in incense on vast waterless plains, and the people of

19. E.O. Winstedt, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes*, (Cambridge, 1909), pp. 72-73; J.W. McCrindle, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, (London, 1897), p. 56.

20. W. Wolska, *La topographie chrétienne de Cosmas Indicopleustes*, (Paris, 1962), p. 1.

21. On this issue, Dorese comments: "Quand situer ce grand roi de qui, malgré la longueur particulière de son règne (plus de 27 ans) l'histoire a très injustement oublié le nom?" ("L'Éthiopie et l'Arabie méridionale, aux III^e et IV^e siècles A.D. d'après les découvertes récentes": *Kush* 5 (1957), p. 57.

Solate, and I commanded them keep guard over the sea-beaches. When I had fought and overthrown in battles, wherein I myself took part, all these people who were protected by mighty mountains, I permitted them all to keep their land as tributaries. Now the greater number of these people submitted to me voluntarily and paid tribute. I sent a naval force and soldiers against the Arrabitaie and the Kinaidokolpitaie, who live on the other side of the Red Sea, and when I had overthrown all their kings, I commanded them to pay tribute for their country, and to go about their business by sea and land in peace. I made war from Leuke Kome to the land of the Sabaeans. All these peoples have been conquered by me, the first and only one of the kings who were before me, through the grace which (I have found before my august god Ares, who has also begotten me, and who has made subject to my sovereignty all the peoples who adjoin my land in the East as far as the Land of Incense, and in the West as far as the lands of Ethiopia and the Sasous, some against whom I myself marched and fought, and some against whom I sent troops. And having established peace in all the world which has been conquered by me, I have come to Adulis to offer up sacrifices to Zeus and Ares, and to Poseidon on behalf of the sea-faring folk. And having collected and gathered together my troops I established this throne on this spot and offer it to Ares as a pledge in the twenty-seventh year of my sovereignty".²²

This king had expanded his dominion on both sides of the Red Sea. Most of the names which are mentioned in this inscription are difficult to identify today. However we have two things which help us: the description of the lands and their position. We can thus identify some of these lands. The first people who were defeated by him lived around Aksum. Then he conquered those who lived in the north. Next he conquered the people to the south and east as far as the land of incense. Finally, he went by sea to the other side of the Red Sea where he occupied some parts of northern Arabia.

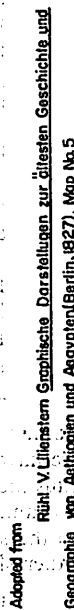
In the inscription the *Gazé* are first mentioned. About these people an old commentator says: "*Gazé* are the Aksumites and until this day they call themselves Agazian."²³ The commentator was writing from an historical point of view, for these people, who came from South Arabia, settled in this region. But the question is whether Aksum was included in the original kingdom of this king and, if not, where then was his capital city? How big was his kingdom? Of course, the king himself must have been of Semitic origin, on one side at least. In this case, we can conclude that all those people of South Arabian origin were not united politically and some of them, like the *Gazé*, were independent of the others. *Agamé* is in Tigré province about 125 kms. east of Aksum; it is still called by the same name, and its capital is Adigrat. *Sigye* also must be in this area between *Agamé* and *Adua*, but some locate it to the west of Lake Tana.²⁴ *Awa* can be identified as *Eue* which is near *Yeha*, or with *Adua* itself. "The position of *Aua* is fixed by the itinerary of Nonnosus, the envoy of Justinian to the king of Axum in 531, only eleven or twelve years after the time Cosmas visited those shores. In this itinerary *Auê* is a district situated half-way between *Adule* and *Axum*. The name still exists in that of the city of *Adoua* (*Ad'Oua* - city of *Oua*) the present capital of Tigré."²⁵ *Zygabine* and *Angabe*, according to the commentator in the book of Cosmas, were tribes which were living around *Adulis*. *Tiamo*, according to the commentator, were the people who were living in what is today called Gambella and their neighbours who lived on the other side of the Nile. Littman

22. W. Budge, *A History of Ethiopia*, vol. 1, pp. 238-239.

23. Winstedt, *Cosmas*, p. 74.

24. McCrindle, *Cosmas*, pp. 60-61.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 61, n. 1.



32. Conti Rossini, *Storia*, p. 120.

mentioned directly, and the *Agi'azi* whom he conquered were the inhabitants of this region. But there is no doubt that he had another city which was his capital and that of his predecessors.

From this inscription we know that this monarch was a descendant of previous kings and that he had greatly expanded the kingdom which he had received from his father. He was not the founder of a new dynasty, but he had made the existing kingdom more powerful.³³ In this inscription he declares this fact by saying: "All these peoples have been conquered by me, the first and only one of the kings who were before me". How big and how powerful was the dominion of his predecessors,³⁴ we cannot learn from this inscription.

In the time of this emperor, the country enjoyed great prosperity and power. It is highly probable that all the sources of wealth, i.e., the elephant hunts, the acquisition of incense and gold, were under his control. From a military point of view, he had land and sea forces well-trained in military tactics. His reign had lasted 27 years prior to the time he united these people and engraved the inscription. The people conquered by him were not tribes but "nations", which is the term used in the text. At that time he was the only emperor in East Africa who had under his control a vast territory, a well-organized administration and wealth. In order to verify the date of this inscription, it would be very helpful if we had the inscription itself. If we knew also the name of the king, it would be possible, by comparing his name with the lists of the kings, to conclude whether he was a king who lived before or after Christ. However, from what he mentioned in the inscription we can date it approximately.

In the beginning, he made war against the *Gazé* and, as we have seen, the *Gazé* were identified with the *Agi'azian* who were the inhabitants of Aksum. In that case, this city was not his capital. From the first century of the Christian era, Aksum was the seat of the emperor, as is testified to in the inscription and in the *Periplus*. On the other hand, he mentioned that his dominion in Arabia extended from Leuke-Kome to the land of the Sabaeans. That is important from the chronological point of view; Leuke-Kome, which was located just opposite Berenice on the northeast coast of the Red Sea,³⁵ is a port city most probably founded by Ptolemy Euergetes II around the year 131 B. C.³⁶ Therefore, this unknown Ethiopian emperor must have reigned after the foundation of Leuke-Kome.

Another point to be borne in mind for dating this inscription is the Ethiopian dominion in Arabia. According to archaeological evidence, the Ethiopians actively intervened in the internal affairs of South Arabia, at least from the second half of the second century of our era.³⁷ If we bear in mind that the intervention took place after the consolidation of the occupied area in the north of Arabia, we can push back the initial years of the occupation. To sum up once again, the capital of this king was not Aksum. On the other hand, he must have lived after the foundation of Leuke-Kome, which means after the second century B.C. In this case, we have an *ante quam* first century B.C., and a *post quam* first century A.D.: I think his reign must be placed within this period until we fix it definitely with the discovery of authentic documents.³⁸

33. H. von Wissmann and M. Höffner, "Beiträge", p. 119; H. von Wissmann, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 65 ff.

34. Perhaps it may be appropriate to apply the term *empire* from this time on.

35. G. Butler, *The Public School Atlas of Ancient Geography in 28 Maps*, (London, 1905), map 7.

36. Kortenbeutel, *Der ägyptische Sued-und Osthandel*, p. 45.

37. H. von Wissmann, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 66.

38. McCrindle, *op. cit.*, p. 65, n. 3; Kortenbeutel, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

This inscription is of considerable significance for Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular. It provides concrete information about the ethnography and geography of northeast Africa. The description of the Greek geographers, as it stands, does not give the real picture of the people of this region. This inscription helps us to check the information supplied by Greek geographers and, at the same time, is an authoritative source in this field. None of the Greek names with a suffix "phagi" appear here; instead the real names of different ethnic groups are given without any attempt to Hellenize them. Although there is not much detail about the life of the people from the short descriptions, we can draw the conclusion that the inhabitants of this region were not only pastoralists but also merchants and soldiers. From a geographical point of view, it renders manifold services. It gives us concrete information about topography, climatology, orography, hydrography and demography.

From the historical point of view, it provides valuable information about the political, cultural, economic, artistic and military life of Ethiopia at that time. It reveals that in northeast Africa there existed a powerful, prosperous and well-organized empire which rivalled the Roman Empire and was its equal, at least in the economic sphere. It was headed by a well-educated Emperor who belonged to the lineage of the existing dynasty. If we judge him by his actions, he was a ruler who had a definite foreign and domestic policy. His idea was not only to control African commerce, but also that of the Red Sea. Since he occupied the Red Sea basin, obviously he was in a position to control the east-west trade. After he had occupied key positions on both sides of the Red Sea, he did not risk another war in further extending his territory. Throughout his territory, peace and order reigned. He succeeded in achieving that through an efficient administrative machinery. The boundaries of his empire, which are clearly defined in the inscription, were: in the east, the country of incense; in the northeast, the land of the Arabitae and Kinaidocolpitae on the east side of the Red Sea; in the north, as far as the frontier of Egypt; in the west, Sasu (-Assossa?); in the south, the land of the Rhausi.

Certain economic advantages resulted from the submission of these places. He gained control of the main resources, such as gold, incense, and spices. He cleared the sea of pirates and secured the safety of the land route from his empire to Egypt. In this way merchants were able to transport their goods to and from the African coast without disturbance by land and sea. The occupation of Leuke-Kome on the north coast of the Red Sea had special significance for the trade of Asia. As McCrindle notes, Leuke-Kome was a port and a leading mart "from which at one time the costly wares received from India and Arabia were transmitted to Petra of the Nabataeans."³⁹

As in the case of Zoskales, this emperor also was well-versed in Greek literature. It seems certain that he used the Greek language only to commemorate his victory. It is *Koine* Greek with perfect grammatical and syntactical accuracy. The absence of Sabaeans or Ge'ez indicates how widely Greek was used during that time. The dedication of the throne to Greek gods and the emperor's invocation to them is additional evidence. In addition, the crafts he employed to make the throne and altar for sacrifice, provide some evidence of the introduction of Greek art in Adulis at least. As well as the inscription, there was found on the throne, a bas-relief of two Greek gods, Hercules (god of strength) and Hermes (god of wealth).⁴⁰ Fortunately we have a picture of the throne in the book of Cosmas, and if we compare it with the throne of Hawulti we

39. McCrindle, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

realize that there is a difference in size and decoration. The former resembles Greek art while the latter is an imitation of Mesopotamian art.

Military organization was the core of his success. He had an army that was well-disciplined, well-trained and able to fight in any climatic conditions. How large this army was we are not in a position to tell, but from the phrase "I commanded them (the people of Solaté) keep guard over the sea-beaches," we can draw the conclusion that he lacked sufficient soldiers to leave in this commercially important position. He had divided the army into different regiments under officers. In actual fact, he himself was the supreme commander-in-chief, but this does not imply his personal presence in every expedition. For example, in the war he waged on the other side of the Red Sea, against the Arabitae and Kinaidocolpitae, he simply sent an expeditionary force under a certain captain by ship. The kind of arms which his army used were not mentioned, but they cannot have differed greatly from the conventional arms of that time, i.e., spears, daggers, swords, axes and shields. These arms are engraved in bas-reliefs on the Aksumite monuments and specimens of them are also found at Yeha.⁴¹ As far as his naval force is concerned, I think it must be assumed to have consisted of mercantile ships which were converted for the purpose of transporting the army to the other side of the Red Sea.

3. Aksumite Culture

There is no unanimity as to the origin of the word Aksum. C. Conti Rossini derives the word from Semitic root *aksum* which signifies *hortus veridis et densis herbis impletus*, a green and dense garden, full of grass.⁴²

According to some philologists, the word Aksum is partially Agaw in origin. "Ak" or "Aku" means water, whereas the suffix "sum" is Semitic and means chief. If this etymology is correct, Aksum means "chief's water".⁴³ It is also important to note that in the northeast of Aksum there is a well which is still called Mai Shum,⁴⁴ which means the same as Ak+Sum; the difference being that this is a fully Semitic term. If this etymology is correct, it throws some light on the development of the Aksumite civilization. It was composed of two independent elements which became fused into one in the course of time.

The traditional source, however, differs radically from this view about the same issue. It tries to derive the word from the name of a legendary Emperor, Aksumawi, in the same way as it derives Ethiopia from Aethiops. But ironically enough, it does not attribute the foundation of the city to Aksumawi. Some Ethiopian scholars have attempted to show that the word derives from a Ge'ez verb - *አከሰ* "to dedicate": as such it appears in the dedicatory writings of the emperors.⁴⁵ In some Ge'ez texts, however, the etymology, derives from another root: "*ወበአገተዝ ተሰዖኖ ሰግ ለይላቲ ሀገር አከሰም እስመ ትርጉሚ ለአከሰም መካነ ስም ብሄል ዘውላቱ መካነ ዕንቁ...*" This is why this city was called Aksum. Aksum means the name of a place so to say the site of diamond".⁴⁶

Aksum and Aksumite are mentioned in epigraphical monuments and literature

41. F. Anfray, "Une campagne de fouilles à Yeha": AE 5 (1963), pp. 180-181; J. Doresse, *Ethiopia*, pp. 65 and 68.

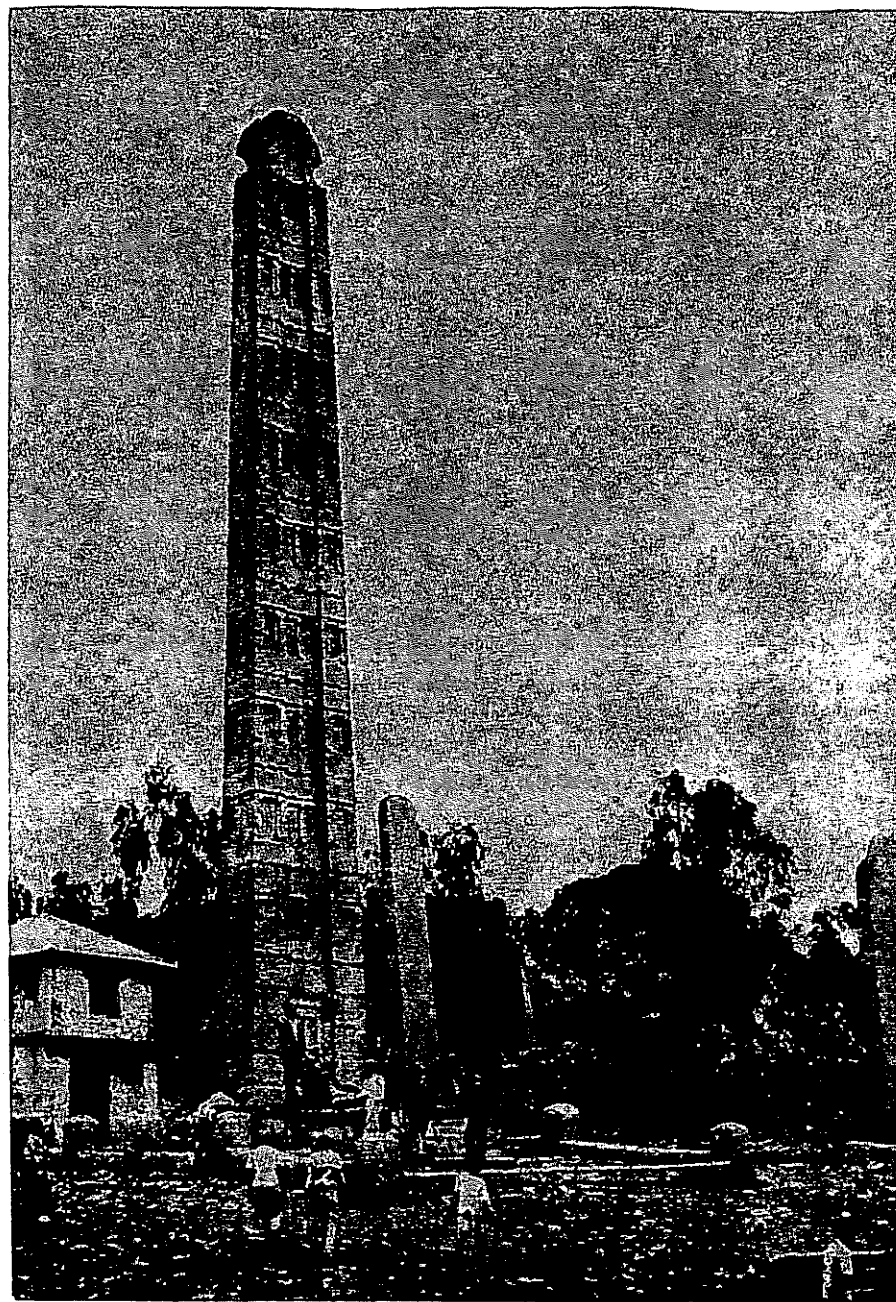
42. C. Conti Rossini, "Saggio sulla toponomastica dell'Eritrea tigrina": *Bollettino della reale Società Geografica Italiana*, Serie VII, vol. III, 10 (1938), p. 3.

43. J. Tubiana, "Les noms de parents en Amharique": *Comptes rendus du groupe linguistique des études chamito-sémitiques*, (1953), p. 48 ff.

44. U. Monneret de Villard, *Aksum*, p. 8 ff.

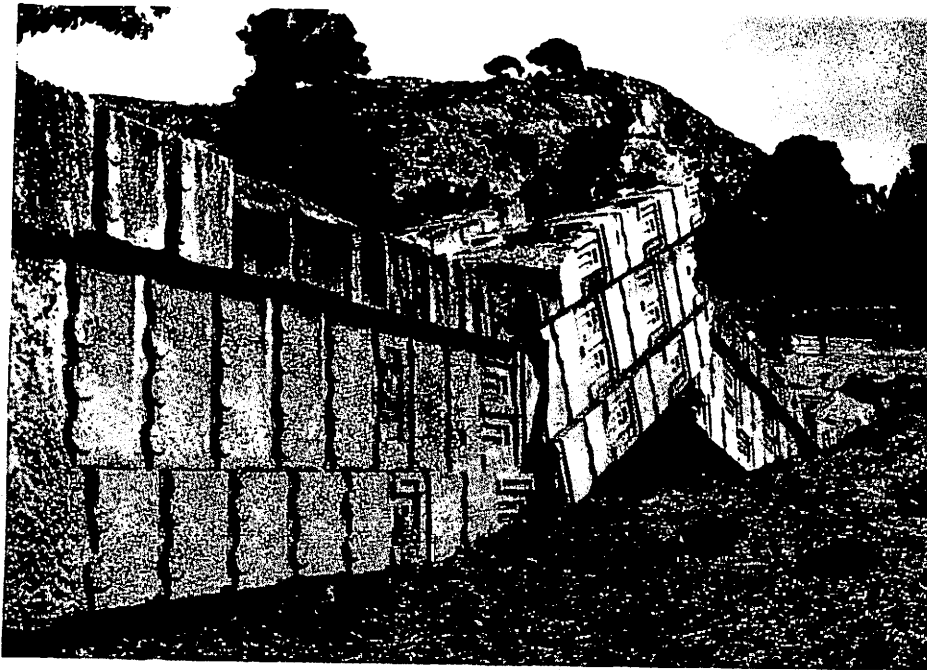
45. Conti Rossini, "L'evangelio d'oro di Dabra Libanos": *RRAL* ser. 5, vol. 10 (1901) pp. 186 and 189.

46. *Idem*, *Gadla Marqorewos*, CSCO, *Scriptores Aethiopici*, vol. XXII (1904), p. 24.



The standing stele of Aksum.

Photo: Serg



The fallen stele of Aksum 33m. high.

Photo: Institute of Eth. Archaeology

in different languages: Greek, Sabaeen, Ge'ez and Latin at least from the first century c the Christian era. The mutilated Greek inscription of *Abba Pentelēwon* contains the first mention of Aksumite,⁴⁷ and in literature it appears first in the *Periplus*,⁴⁸ where the same word is found in the plural. The recently discovered South Arabian inscriptions refer both to *Aksum* and *Aksumite*.⁴⁹ In Ge'ez the oldest text, so far, which mentions Aksum is the inscription of Gadar.⁵⁰ In Latin *Aksumitae*, in the plural, is mentioned once (ἄπο ἀκσούμενων) in *Historia Augusta*.⁵¹

The second point to discuss here is the correct term for the Aksumite realm, and whether it should be described as an *empire* or a *kingdom*. In the inscriptions discovered in northern Ethiopia, we find both of these terms. So far, the inscription of Semburthe the Great is the oldest inscription in which we find the term "King of Kings". It is repeated by Ezana in the fourth century. On the coins, however, only the title of "king" was used for the obvious reason of lack of space. From a geographical standpoint, the Aksumite realm extended beyond the Red Sea and it consisted of different ethnic and cultural groups. This implies the term *empire*. Moreover, this term is still used today not as a realistic description, but as an historic term. I suggest Aksumite Empire is the more appropriate term for the Aksumite dominion.

As we have seen, during the time of the unknown emperor of the Adulis inscription Aksum was not the capital city. But we have another Greek inscription on the hill of *Abba Pentelēwon*⁵² in which Aksum is mentioned three times. The inscription has eight lines in all but only one line (the fourth one) is completely legible. It implies that Aksum was the capital city and its patron was Ares, the personal god of the emperor. Although this inscription is mutilated, it is nonetheless, as E. Littmann says, an invaluable source of historical significance.⁵³ Even the name of the emperor is mutilated, but his territory extended as far as the other side of the Red Sea.

English Translation

1. ...in this space...
2. ...and he orders (?) to be repaired...
3. ...it and the other side of the sea
4. unconquerable (god) of the Aksumite
5. ...the first and only (?)
6. ...in distant (and) big...
7. ...an infantry ...I have dedicated
8. ...to unconquered Ares of Aksumite

It is possible to date this inscription, for we possess the original. It was found in the treasury of the monastery church of *Abba Pentelēwon* and, according to palaeographical evidence, it belongs to the first century A.D.⁵⁴ The content of this inscription is similar to that of *Monumentum Adulitanum*, but this does not necessarily mean that it belongs to the same emperor. If we take into account the repeated mention of Aksum and the association of Ares, who possessed a sanctuary as patron of the city, we have to

47. *DAE*, vol. IV, p. 2.

48. *Periplus* 4.

49. A. Jamme, *Sabaeen Inscriptions*: JA 576,577 ff.

50. A. Caquot et A. Drewes, "Les monuments": *AE* 1 (1955) p. 37.

51. *Hist. August.* 33, 4.

52. *DAE*, vol. IV, p. 3.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

54. *DAE*, vol. IV, p. 2.

attribute it at least to an immediate successor whose capital city was Aksum. So far, this is the oldest Greek inscription ever found in Aksum and its existence is a proof that the Greek language penetrated to the inland parts of the empire. It is interesting to note there that the spelling of the word Αξωμίται (Aksomitae) is the same as in the *Periplus* and this could be a point in favour of attributing the inscription to Zoskales.

In the first century, at least as has been generally believed until now, we find an interesting source in Greek. This time it is not an inscription but a handbook written by a certain Greek merchant who, for commercial reasons, travelled in areas bordering the Red Sea. It is entitled the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*.⁵⁵

This book describes the countries which lay on both sides of the Red Sea. The author set out from Berenice, a principal Egyptian port for eastern trade. From there, he came to Adulis, visiting and describing the cities and places north of this port-city. Concerning Adulis, it is stated in the *Periplus* that it was: "A port established by law lying at the inner end of a bay that runs in towards the south."⁵⁶

The author wanted to underline that Adulis was a natural port. He counts 37 port-towns which traded with the Roman Empire, but of these he mentions only three as ports "established by law"; Adulis on the African coast, Mouza on the Arabian coast, and Obollah which later became known as Charax on the coast of the Persian Gulf. (The latter was not visited by the author of the *Periplus*).⁵⁷ The term "established by law" perhaps means that because these ports exported so much material, there were many foreigners established there dealing in exports. This implies some kind of agreement with the local government. As Palmer says, it signifies a "law abiding mart", i.e., a trading place where law applies, or a trading place where traders are protected by law.⁵⁸ The commercial relations between the Aksumite and Graeco-Roman world were established by law; i.e., they were based on a mutual agreement between the trading countries. The details of this agreement are not found in the *Periplus* or in works by any other contemporary writer. Only very late in the fourth century does Rufinus, a Roman Christian writer, tell us that the agreement between the Ethiopians and Romans had been broken off.⁵⁹

55. Some of the important publications are the following: C. Mueller, *Geographi Graeci Minores*, (Paris, 1855), vol I, pp. 257-305; H. Frisk, *Le Périphe de la mer Érythrée, suivi d'une étude sur la tradition et la langue*, (Göteborg, 1927); B. Fabricius, *Der Periplus des Erythraischen Meeres, von einem Unbekannten*, (Leipzig, 1883); W.H. Schoff, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, (London et. al., 1912). The date of the *Periplus* has been a subject of dispute among scholars. J. Pirenne in her works, *Le Royaume sud-arabe de Qatabân et sa datation d'après l'archéologie et les sources classiques, jusqu'au Périphe de la mer Érythrée*, (Louvain, 1961); *Idem*, "Un problème clef pour la chronologie de l'orient: La date du Périphe de la mer Érythrée": *JA* 249 (1961) suggests the 3rd century as the date of composition of the *Periplus*. Some other scholars also accept this date: H. de Contenson, "Les premiers rois d'Axoum d'après les découvertes récentes": *JA* 248 (1960), p. 83; A.J. Drewes, *Inscriptions*, pp. 101-102. Recently, however, after discoveries of more source materials, there has been a tendency to return to the previously accepted date of the first century A.D. A. Dihle, *Umstrittene Daten Untersuchungen zum Auftreten der Griechen am Roten Meer* (Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, vol. 32, Köln, 1965); H. von Wissmann, "Himyar, Ancient-History": *Muséon* 77, (1964) p. 472; *Idem*, *Zur Geschichte*, pp. 56-69; J. Ryckmans, "Petits royaumes sud-arabes d'après les auteurs classiques": *Muséon* 70 (1957) p. 79. For practical reasons I stick to the old date. For the number of scholars who agree with this idea, see *Beziehungen*, pp. 88 and 118. This problem has been discussed and the views of various scholars summarized in a recent article by W. Raunig, "Die Versuche einer Datierung des Periplus maris Erythraei": *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien* C. 1970, pp. 231-242.

56. *Periplus* 4.

57. J.A.B. Palmer, "Periplus Maris Erythraei": *Classical Quarterly* 45 (1951), p. 156.

58. *Ibid.*

59. See text below, p. 98.

As related in the *Periplus*, Ethiopia carried on trade with different people, which can be seen from the articles imported. (see table). The export articles of Ethiopia were sent first to Egypt and from there they passed to Greece and farther to the western world. All the Ethiopian goods which came by the Red Sea were taken to Coptos, and that city was the general *entrepôt* port for such merchandise.⁶⁰ Egyptian customs were in force in all ports of the Red Sea and the duty on all imported articles was 25% of the cost, but we do not know the export tariffs.⁶¹ Although the majority of the goods came and went to the west, the commercial relations of Ethiopia with the east were of no less importance. Persia, India and China were the main countries which regularly traded with Ethiopia. Chinese sources of the pre-Christian era and also in the first century A.D. mention that Chinese ships visited the African coast to exchange goods. The articles which they imported from the region were the same as those exported from Adulis: ivory, tortoise-shell, live rhinoceros and rhinoceros horn.⁶² Furthermore, the appearance of Persian and Indian articles in Adulis implies constant commercial exchanges between these countries and Ethiopia. This fact is mentioned a number of times by Greek writers of the Hellenistic period.

From a geographical point of view, the *Periplus* informs us that Ethiopian territory extended from the land of the Moschophagi to the land of the Berber (Berbera). These are the frontiers in the north and south. To the east, the author knew Leuke-Korra and had this to say about it: "It holds the position of a market-town for the small vessels sent there from Arabia and so a centurion is stationed there as a collector of one-fourth of the merchandise imported with an armed garrison."⁶³ But he does not specify it as territory of the Aksumites, which in fact it was, and he lets it be understood that the boundary was the Red Sea. The western boundary he did not know exactly; he only says that it was beyond the River Nile in a place where elephants were hunted.⁶⁴

As far as the exports of the Aksumite Empire are concerned, the *Periplus* mentions only the main commodities: ivory, tortoise-shell and rhinoceros horn (and teeth?). No doubt, the exports included other items. In this respect the gap is filled by Pliny. He mentions that ivory, rhinoceros horn, hippopotamus hides, tortoise shell, apes, gold, myrrh, frankincense, ginger, cassia, cinnamon and slaves were exported from Ethiopia.⁶⁵

On another occasion, the same author mentions that Ethiopian elephants were imported for show in circuses.⁶⁶ Although the author of the *Periplus* enumerates a long list of goods imported into Adulis, numerically far exceeding exports, it should not be thought that this indicates an imbalance in Aksumite trade as the exports were precious commodities of great value. African ivory was particularly precious material used for many purposes. If we confine our attention to the Hellenistic period only, we find that it was used to embellish imperial thrones, chariots, sofas, sideboards, boxes, etc. In carving, ivory was used to decorate imperial palaces, i.e., walls, ceilings, floors and doors. The palace of the Ptolemies of Egypt, for example, was decorated with ivory. Sometimes it was used to produce bed legs, sceptres, small statuettes, sticks, etc., or for domestic

60. Strabo XVII, 45.

61. *Periplus*. 19; J. Toutain, *The Economic Life of the Ancient World*, (London, 1930), p. 160.

62. A. Herrmann, Ein alter Seeverkehr zwischen Abessinien und Süd-China, bis zum Beginn unserer Zeitrechnung": *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft der Erdkunde*, 10, (1913), pp. 554-555; Sergeev, *Beziehungen*, p. 66 ff.; Kortenbeutel, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

63. *Periplus* 19.

64. *Periplus* 4.

65. Pliny VI, 24, 173-174; XII, 42, 87; XXXVI-XXXVII ff.

66. Previously the Roman Senate had forbidden the import of African elephants into Italy. Later this decision was waived and the import of African elephants was authorized for purpose of show. Pliny VIII, 24, 64.

articles like combs, hair pins, knife handles and umbrella staffs; it was also used for sword handles, insignia on shields and for musical instruments such as the flute and cythara. For all these purposes, African ivory was preferred for the obvious reason that "African male and female elephants produce a good-sized tusk".⁶⁷ Rhinoceros horns, on the other hand, were used for domestic objects. The use of tortoise-shell for decorative purposes was as extensive as that of ivory. In addition it was used as a drug against the bite of serpents, for epilepsy, and other diseases.

The capital city of Ethiopia was then Aksum. It was eight days' journey inland from Adulis. The king was at that time called Zoskales. The author of the *Periplus* says that the king was "acquainted with Greek literature". He adds that he was "miserly in his ways and always striving for more, but otherwise upright". He called him a king, not a tyrant, which was the term that he used for most of the rulers along both sides of the Red Sea. This indicates that the king had not seized power by force, but had received it through regular succession. This king can be identified with Ze-Haqile who, according to the Ethiopian chronicles, reigned for thirteen years. The British traveller of the nineteenth century, H. Salt, supposed that he ruled from 76-89 A. D., but W. Schoff, the American editor of the *Periplus*, thinks that 59 A.D. would be more likely as the coronation date.⁶⁸ However, it is preferable to say that he lived sometime in the first century A.D. H. von Wissmann attempts to derive the name from another Ge'ez word Sahlê, "he (the provincial king) of the coastal lowlands". But this does not correspond to the account that the territory under the rule of Zoskales reached from the Mobxouaroi south of the frontier of Egypt as far as the straits. The "Zo in the name of Zoskales may show that Zoskales means the name of the clan of the ruler, not his personal name. This again may point to a dynastic subversion by him."⁶⁹

By the beginning of the second century the commercial activity of Aksum and its political power had not diminished. Contact continued with the west as well as the east. During the reign of Trajan, we hear that the Ethiopians were on friendly terms with the Roman Empire. Between 105 and 108, he founded the *Provincia Arabica*.⁷⁰ The idea, of course, was to develop and secure the eastern trade which was essential for the supply of luxury goods for the Roman aristocracy. He also showed a keen interest in improving and securing communications with northeast Africa. In other words, both Aksum and Rome had interests in African, as well as in Asian commerce. Such competition might be expected to lead to clashes and long-range war. Available sources do not reveal such a development. On the contrary, some scant information we have underlines the friendly relations between both powers. Dio of Prusa observed that the Ethiopian envoys, with other oriental delegates (Arabs, Bactrians, Scythians, Persians, and Indians) were present at the court of the emperor.⁷¹ Claudius Ptolemy, who wrote his book in the second century, knew the boundaries of Ethiopia. The overseas territory is not specifically mentioned, but he does mention the land of the Kinaidocolpitae and

67. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ed. 1967, vol. 12, p. 806.

68. Schoff, *The Periplus*, pp. 66-67.

69. H. von Wissmann, "Himyar", p. 479, n. 130; *Idem.*, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 67; H. de Contenson, "Les premiers rois", p. 76. In some unpublished Ethiopian MSS it is pointed out that: ወንግሥ ወልደ ሐቅሌ ወስመ መንግሥት ሠርገይ ኧ ዓመት, while in the list of kings found in the end of the *Gedle Abreha and Asbeha* in Aksum, he appears to have ruled the country for 12 years, from 131-143 A.D. which is relatively close to the date of the *Periplus*.

70. H. von Wissmann, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 66.

71. H. von Arnim, *Leben und Werke des Dion von Prusa*, (Berlin, 1898), p. 435 ff.; Kortenbeutel, *op.cit.*, pp. 67-68.

TABLE

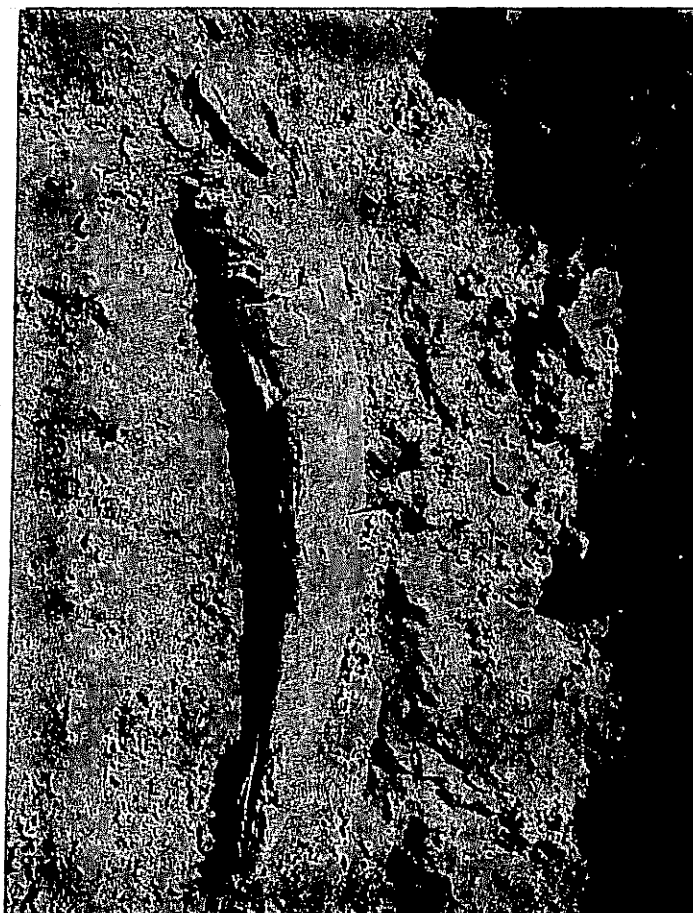
ARTICLES IMPORTED INTO ETHIOPIA

Item	Origin	Quality	Comment
Clothes	Egypt	"second"	Dyed of various colours for barbarian market.
Robes	Arsinoe (Egypt)	—	For ladies, made from flax
Cloaks	Italy (?)	made of poor cloth imitating a better quality and dyed	The Roman "abolla" was a military cloak perhaps not unlike our watch cloak
Linen mantles	Egypt	—	Double fringe
Striped clothes & striped mantles	"	—	Double fringe
Glass, plate & Crystal	Diospolis (Egypt)	"second" imitation	For domestic usage
Brass	Diospolis (?) (Egypt)	fused with different materials to give them colour or make them attractive	Several sorts for ornaments and cut into pieces to pass for money.
Copper	"	—	Sheets and soft, used for cooking utensils and cut up for bracelets and anklets for women.
Iron	India	Best	Consumed in making spear-heads for hunting the elephants and other animals and in making weapons

Axes	India (?)	—	Small size
Adze	India (?)	—	In contradiction to axes
Knives (daggers)	India (?)	—	Worn at girdle
Drinking vessels	—	—	Copper—large and round
Coins	Egypt (?)	—	Small quantity for use of merchants and residents in the country. Dinurius, the Roman coin worth in general denomination nearly 3p. in English currency
Wine	Italy, Syria (Laodicea)	—	Not much
Olive oil	Syria (?)	—	Not much
Silver & gold plates	—	"second"	For the King
Dresses	Persia	Cheap	Made according to the fashion of the country for the King
Cotton cloth	India	Very best and finest	Great width
Raw cotton	"	Particularly fine	For stuffing
Girdles	"	—	—
Coats	Persia	Cheap (?)	Made of skins with hair or fur
Webs of cloth	Persia	Fine	Mallow tinted or dyed of a whitish purple
Muslins	India	Fine	In small quantity
Gum Lac	"	—	A dye of red purple. Used by women for dyeing the nails and feet.

Ivory discovered at Adulis in 1961

Photo: Institute of Eth. Archaeol.



its location can be identified with the Adulis inscriptions.⁷² He knew of the port of the Aksumite empire, Adulis, and located it correctly on his map, but he makes no comment on it. Aksum and Coloë are mentioned and the former is indicated as the seat of the empire where the king's palace is found. The name of the king is not mentioned. Although the country was well-known by that time, he still uses the old names for the different peoples of the country: Rhizophagi, Elephantophagi and Struthophagi. In addition, he includes some names derived from real place-names: *Adulitae* and *Axumitae*. As far as the commercial activity of the Aksumite empire is concerned, he remains silent. According to him, elephants, tigers and rhinoceros are found far inland in the western part of Ethiopia. It is true that archaeological evidence has not been found to establish the name of Zaqile, but, of course, this does not necessarily mean he was merely a governor of a peripheral area.

Ethiopian overseas territory was still under the administration of the Aksumite Empire. Around 130 A.D., when Rabbi Ben Akiba⁷³ visited the region of Haggā in Arabia in modern Higāz and Asir, he found that the ruler of the place was conspicuously distinguished from the Bedouins in colour and social position. He and his wife were quite black in colour and he himself said that he was a *Kushi*. His position in society was high. Although he had no further details about this man, it is probable that he was a representative of the Aksumite Emperor. As we know from the inscription of Adulis, Ethiopian dominion had earlier been extended to the coastal strip on the eastern shore of the Red Sea, a location of strategic and commercial significance. But the emperor who played a major role in the expansion of the overseas territory was Gadar, King of Aksum. As attested to by the Sabaeen inscription, this emperor intervened actively in South Arabian affairs.

Inscription JA 631⁷⁴

1. Qatbān 'Awkān, descendant of Garat, rulers of [the] tribe Sumhurām Yuhawlid have [dedicated]
2. to 'Ilumquhū Tahwān, master of 'Awwām, [these] two statues [which are] bronze, in praise]
3. because He has assisted His worshipper Qatbān 'Awkān, descendant of Garat [and their tribe]
4. Sumhurām Yuhawlid in killing and cutting and crushing and humbling [and]
5. destroying in the desirable attacks [with which] they assaulted and slew the king and the
6. tribes [who] started war against their lord Sa'irum 'Awtar, king of Saba[']
7. and Raydān by sea and land when they assisted their lord Sa'irum
8. 'Awtar, king of Saba' and Raydān; and they repelled and seized and killed and
9. captured and plundered and rejoiced with war trophy and captives and booty, which was desired, in the

72. H. von Wissmann, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 66.

73. Conti Rossini, *Storia*, p. 120; *Idem*, "Expéditions et possessions", p. 18; H. von Wissmann, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 66. At Saib Samma in South Arabia a stone engraving of a seated lady was found, with a monothec Sabaean inscription, *hbst*: Abyssinian (feminine); see G. Ryckmans, "Une 'Éthiopienne' en Arabe" *AE* 2 (1957), pp. 3-5. There is some similarity to an engraving of a woman found at Haoulti-Mela: The word *hbst* as a proper or clan name is linked with Ethiopia. This perhaps allows us to draw analogy with the event described by Rabbi Ben Akiba.

74. A. Jamme, *Sabaean Inscriptions from Mahram Bilqis (Mārib)*, (Baltimore, 1962), pp. 132-133.

10. desirable encounters [in which] they assisted their lord Sa'irum 'Awtar, king of Saba' and Ray-
11. dān; and because He has protected His worshipper Qatbān 'Awkān, descendant of Garat when sent
12. him their lord Sa'irum 'Awtar, king of Saba' and Raydān, into the land of
13. the Habasites against Gadarat, king of the Habasites and of 'Aksūman; and they came
14. back from there in safety, he and all their train; and they have satisfied their lord Sa'i-
15. rum 'Awtar, king of Saba' and Raydān, in all their military duties against the Negus,
16. a perfect reward, which pleased their lord, from all that with which they have been endowed; and because
17. 'Ilumquhū Tahwān, master of 'Awwām, has assisted His worshipper Qatbān 'Awkān, descendant of Ga-
18. rat and their tribe Sumhurām Yuhawlid when were fighting and helping Qatbān
19. 'Awkān, descendant of Garat and their tribe Sumhurām Yuhawlid from the city [of] Na'id
20. to the city [of] Zafār as their patron 'Attar 'Azizān had favored them, when
21. Baygat, the child of the Negus and the expeditionary force of the Habasites went forth and sent out toward the ci-
22. ty [of] Zafār; and they settled down in the region of the city [of] Zafār; and then departed Qatbān 'Awkān,
23. descendant of Garat and their tribe Sumhurām Yuhawlid into the city [of] Zafār into
24. Qatr Wa'd during the night; and then the Habasites went from them into the citadel
25. of the god in the center of the city; and went forth Qatbān 'Awkān, descendant of Garat and their tribe Sum-
26. hurām Yuhawlid and they then associated with Li'azzum Yuhnaf Yuhasdiq, king of Saba' and Raydān, and with the rulers and the tribes of Raydān; and they killed and eradicated and
27. destroyed the Habasites from the center of the city; and the third day came to an agreement
28. some of Damār and the cavalry squadron of the army and some of the tribes of Raydān and they betrayed,
29. the camp of the Habasites during the night; and so they killed from the Habasites four hun-
30. dred soldiers beheaded; and the third day came to an agreement Qatbān 'Awkān,
31. descendant of Garat and their tribe Sumhurām Yuhawlid and they then turned aside from the Habasites
32. and from them in scattering [in] Ma'āfirum; and so they killed [some] of the Habasites by
33. turning aside; and the Habasites returned from them to their encampment; and after the second
34. day the Habasites [being] famished, withdrew from the region of Zafār, and went down to
35. Ma'āhiraṭān; and that 'Ilumquhū Tahwān, master of 'Awwām, may continue to make them happy with the esteem

37. and grace of their lord Lahay'atat Yarham, king of Saba' and Ray-
38. dan and [with] the strength of understanding and of power; and that He may cru-
39. ble their foe and their enemy; and that may make them happy 'Ilumquhû Tahwâ
40. master of
41. 'Awwâm, with the magnificence of the fruits of summer and of autumn in the
42. ground and their wâdî-side valleys and their summer
43. settlements and (with) the fruits of summer and of winter; and that he may preser-
44. ve them from the hostility and wickedness of
45. [any] enemy. By 'Ilumquh(û) Tahwân, master of 'Awwâm. 75

In this inscription there are certain points which deserve special attention. In line 1 Gadarat is a "king of the Habasites and of 'Aksūman." *Habasite* here is used to denote the overseas territory of Gadarat which stretched along the northeast coast of the Red Sea, ⁷⁶ which was known as the land of the Arabitae and Kinaidocolpitae. 'Aksūman appears for the first time in South Arabian inscriptions and is used for the land beyond the Red Sea, i.e., Ethiopia. In line 15, the term *Negus* which was equivalent to *Melek* of South Arabia, is used as an exclusive title of Gadarat. In line 21, Baygat, the son of the *Negus* was the commander of the expeditionary Habasites. I do not know whether we can consider Baygat as viceroy of his father in Arabia. Of course if we take into account the fact that at that time it was common in South Arabia for father and son to be co-regents we can consider this a possibility.

The name Gadarat of this inscription appears in the lists of the Ethiopian emperors in many variations. Conti Rossini's List "B"⁷⁷ mentions, on the one hand, Zagdur as successor of Tomay, successor of Ebna Hakim and on the other hand አገዳር, predecessor Sayfa Ar'ad or Senfa Ar'ad, himself predecessor of Abreha and Asbeha. In list "C" ገዳ is given as the successor of Angabo, the man who killed the serpent king Arwe. Here is added that ገዳC reigned 100 years. In list "D", ዘገዳር succeeded Be'esi Angabo, and he himself was successor of Ebna Lehakim. In the same group, the predecessor Abreha and Asbeha was called (አገዳር).

In the list attached at the end of the *Acta* of Abreha and Asbeha which is found in Aksum Sion Church, appear two names; one is Graza Agdour who reigned from 211-221 A.D., and the other his immediate successor Agdour Asguagua, 221-229 A.D. Chronologically both are close to the date of the inscription.⁷⁸

The name also appears in the Ge'ez inscription recently found in the region Asbi Dera, northeast Tigré. It was engraved on an object of bronze and runs from left to right: *gdr ngsy 'ksm tbi' mziit l'rg wlmq*, "GDR, King of Aksum, occupied the pass of RG and LMQ".⁷⁹ Although this inscription consists of only seven words, it has tremendous significance from an historical and literary point of view. First and foremost

75. Translation from *Sabaeen Inscriptions from Mahram Bilqis (Mārib)*, by kind permission of author.

76. H. von Wissmann, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 68. On the contrary, A. Jamme assumed that it is mentioned connection with the African Habasites. See *Sabaeen Inscriptions*, p. 303.

77. C. Conti Rossini, "Les listes des rois d'Aksoum": *JA* (1909), p. 263 ff; *Idem*, *Storia d'Etiopia*, p. 78. *Gedle Abreha and Asbeha*. Ms. Aksum Sion Church, last fol.

79. A. Caquot et A. J. Drewes, "Les monuments recueillis à Maqallé": *AE*, 1 (1955), p37; H. Contenson, "Les premiers rois d'Axoum", p. 83; J. Doresse, *Ethiopia*, trans. E. Coult, (London, 19: p. 49 ff; *Idem*, *L'Empire*, vol. I, p. 24, Sergew Hable-Selassie, *Beziehungen Aethiopiens zur Griech Roemischen Welt* (Bonn, 1963), p. 44.

the discovery of this Ge'ez inscription corroborates the information obtained from the Sabaeen inscriptions of Mahram Bilqis. Today there is no doubt that the Gadarat of the Sabaeans and the Gadar of the Ge'ez inscription both refer to the same person.⁸⁰ What has also been confirmed is the imperial title, *Negus*. Here it should be mentioned that this title does not appear in the Sabaeen inscriptions of Ethiopia. Instead the common Semitic word MLK is used; nor does it appear in the Sabaeen inscription of Ezana.⁸¹ In this Ge'ez inscription the capital city of the Emperor, Aksum, is mentioned for the first time.⁸²

Around 150 or 160 A.D. at the latest, the army of Gadarat was active in the overseas territory. It was likely that the anonymous emperor who occupied territory in Arabia, the land of the Arabitae and Kinaidocolpita, had concluded an agreement with the Sabaeans. This may be why he says that he "made war from Leuke-Kome to the land of the Sabaeans". Gadarat in this respect had a different policy. Unlike the unknown emperor he wanted to expand his territory further. For this purpose he sent auxiliary expeditionary forces under the command of his son Baygat. At first, the expedition was successful. The army of Gadarat occupied the territory along the coast of the Red Sea almost as far as Bab el-Mandab. He then moved eastwards to the land of the Himyarites and subdued the capital city of Zafâr. From here, he proceeded to the north and occupied Nagran. The victory over Himyar, however, remained ephemeral. Sa'irum 'Awtar, the usurper of the Sabaeen throne came to assist Li'azzum Yuhnaf Yuhasdiq of Himyar, who at that time was tributary to Saba, to overthrow the Ethiopian power and they were successful. In a rather sudden attack at night, they expelled the Ethiopians from the city and the war continued in the other territory of South Arabia occupied by Gadarat. As it is mentioned in the inscription JA 635, "...they fought and assisted their lord Sa'irum 'Awtar, king of Saba' and Raydân, in Saharatum against As'arân and Bahrum and those who [w]ere with them, as well as the in region of the city [of] Nagrân [agai]nst the fighting men of the Habasites and those who were with them,..."⁸³ By this united action they drove the Ethiopians from these places. It is interesting to note here that the joint forces of the Sabaeans and Himyarites had not attempted to invade the original territory of Gadarat, the land of the Arabitae and Kinaidocolpita. This was considered as the *de facto* land of the Aksumite Emperor.⁸⁴

In spite of the fact that the land previously occupied by the Aksumites remained intact during the military clash, the people were under constant danger. The growing power of the Sabaeans in alliance with the Himyarites could have brought about their extermination. Gadarat foresaw the peril clearly and tried to avert it in a peaceful way. He proposed an alliance to the two kings of Saba, Alhan Nahfan and his son Sa'irum 'Awtar. His proposal was accepted and a pact was concluded between the two rival powers.⁸⁵

Such were the relations between Aksum and South Arabia towards the end of the second century. On the contrary, we do not yet have adequate source material to establish the extent of Ethiopia's relations with the Graeco-Roman world at that particular time. The new policy of Gadar certainly had an effect on the Romans who controlled Aden on the

east coast of the Red Sea, and Palmyra to the north. The occasional wars which broke out between the Romans and Parthians had not weakened the position of the former in this region; on the contrary, during that time the Romans succeeded in gaining access to the Persian Gulf which secured them direct contact with India and China. Their interest was in the silk trade in particular, as the demand for this commodity was continuously increasing in the Roman world. The development of events in Arabia in reality was alarming for the Romans, and whether they liked it or not they were involved in the affair because by subduing the land of Sahartan and Nagran, Gadarat became the immediate neighbour of the Romans. The Roman chronicles do not define the relations between these powers. If we squeeze the scant archaeological sources discovered recently in Ethiopia, we may assume the relations were friendly. In recent excavations at Matara fourteen Roman gold coins of the second and third centuries have been found.⁸⁶ All of them bear rings for attachment and consequently they may have been used as ornaments. This fact indicates friendly contact with the Romans. Whether the military operations of the Ethiopian forces in Nagra implies any collaboration with the Romans at this stage is difficult to say definitely; but is highly probable. H. von Wissmann believes that there had been a conflict between the Romans and Parthians, and between the Habasites and Hadramawtans, and that the inhabitants of Kindat sided with the Romans.⁸⁷

In the third century, the power and prosperity of Aksum constantly increased. Overseas territory was still under the crown of Ethiopia and the intervention by Aksum in the political life of South Arabia still continued. In addition, the monopoly of eastern trade and the minting of coins was convincing evidence of Aksumite prosperity.

The South Arabian inscriptions have supplied us with the name of an Aksumite Emperor Adbah, who has not yet been confirmed by Ethiopian sources. This Emperor played an outstanding role in the political life of South Arabia. He had a representative in his overseas territory whose name was Sabqalum. The seat of this representative most likely was in Zarbân, in the old occupied territory.⁸⁸ Emperor Adbah followed the same expansionist policy as Gadar. He realised his ambition either by military means, subduing the inhabitants or peacefully, by offering an alliance. When the King of Himyar was Sam Yuhar's II, the country of As'aran and Ma'afir with Sawum and also Saharatum, were dependent on or colonies of the Ethiopians.⁸⁹ The city of Sawum, according to Jamme, was located about 130 kms. northwest of Aden.⁹⁰ Since this region was under the King of Saba, the fact obviously led to military clashes between the Sabaeen king on one side and the combined Ethiopian-Himyarite forces on the other. "...and they (the troops of 'Ilsarah Yahdu fought against the [se...the se] Habasites and 'Akkum and those who were with them from Saharatum [who were] camping far from their children and their slaves, and they (the troops of 'Ilsarah Yahdub) mustered and attacked and slew these Habasites and [...and their children] and their wives, so that they were either killed or captured".⁹¹ After these events, a treaty of peace and friendship was made between the Ethiopians and the Sabaeans. But this did not last long. When war broke out between 'Ilsarah Yahdub and Sarr of Himyar, the latter asked for help from Aksum: "and he, Samir, he of Raydân, se [messengers] to 'Adbah, king of 'Aksûman, [asking] for some support-troops against the kings of Saba'..."⁹²

80. J. Ryckmans, "La chronologie des rois de Saba et du Raydan": *Oriens Antiquus* 3 (1964), p. 84, n. 68; H. de Contenson, *op. cit.*, p. 83; A.J. Drewes, *Inscriptions de l'Éthiopie antique*, p. 101 ff; J. Doresse, "L'Éthiopie et l'Arabie méridionale aux IIe et IVe siècles A.D.", p. 53 ff.

81. *DAE* vol. IV, p. 9; A. Caquot et A.J. Drewes, "Les monuments recueillis à Maqallé", p. 30.

82. A.J. Drewes is doubtful that Aksum was the capital city of that time. This, of course, is the consequence of the date 250 A.D., which he accepts for the composition of the *Periplus*. See, *Inscriptions* p. 101 ff.

83. A. Jamme, *Sabaeen Inscriptions from Mahram Bilqis*, p. 137.

84. H. von Wissmann, "Himyar", p. 475; A. Jamme, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

85. *CHH* 308, a; H. von Wissmann, "Himyar", p. 453; A. Jamme, *Sabaeen Inscriptions from Mahram Bilqis*, p. 294; J. Ryckmans, "Petits royaumes sud-arabes d'après les auteurs classiques", p. 84.

86. F. Anfray, "Matara: deuxième, troisième et quatrième campagnes de fouilles": *AE* 6 (1965), pp. 68-1.

87. H. von Wissmann, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 183.

88. A. Jamme, *Sabaeen Inscriptions from Mahram Bilqis*, p. 323.

89. H. von Wissmann, "Himyar", p. 479.

90. A. Jamme, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

91. *Ibid.*, JA 575/5.

92. *Ibid.*, JA 576/11.

On the other hand 'Ilsarah Yahdub heard about the plan of his adversary and his army, so he also sent his envoys to the Emperor 'Adbah to persuade him to refrain from taking sides with Samir. The messengers of 'Ilsarah were received cordially by the Emperor at Aksum and he advised them not to take any action in the war and an oath of peace was sworn between Habasat and Saba. However, in spite of "the peace and the oath they swore",⁹³ Adbah stood for Samir and sent an auxiliary force under the command of his son, Garmat, in addition to the army that was already stationed in the land of the Kinaidocolpitae under the command of Sabqalum. In this connection the inscription is very clear: "Garmat, the child of the Negus and with him the fighting bands of Habasat and Saharatum went to war against the kings of Saba' just as Samir, he of Raydān, had called them for help".⁹⁴

The advent of the Ethiopian army in South Arabia not only safeguarded the independence of Himyar, but also inflicted heavy losses on the allied forces of Saba: "when have sent him their two lords 'Ilsarah Yahdub and his brother Ya'zil Bayyin, the two kings of Saba' and Raydān against the Habasites and (when) they have held the father of them both, Hawf'atat, him of Gaymān, the Habasites in the city [of] Sawum for one lightning season and two years; and the Habasites have plotted to shave the body of their father Hawf'atat." ⁹⁵ But after two years' preparation, 'Ilsarah, King of Saba, waged war against the Ethiopians and he succeeded in driving them out of Wādī Bays and Wādī Saham.⁹⁶ "Illumquh has vouchsafed to them to defeat and take vengeance on Garmat, the child of the Negus, the king of Aksuman, because of the messengers [who] have deceived those (whom) the king of Saba sent to him".⁹⁷ According to Wissmann, the first Ethiopian occupation in Arabia lasted over one and a half centuries, from 80 or 90 A.D. to 265 A.D.⁹⁸ In the later struggle for power in South Arabia, mention is not made of the Ethiopians. The inscriptions JA 578, 586 and 589 are silent on this issue. This has suggested to Wissmann that the Ethiopians by that time were no longer lords of the Kinaidocolpitae.⁹⁹ At the beginning of 300 A.D., the Kinaidocolpitae seem to have been under the rulers of north Arabia who were supported by the Romans.¹⁰⁰

4. Internal Situation: (a) Inscriptions

The inscription of Safra which is the longest Ge'ez inscription yet found, consists of 79 words. It depicts life within Ethiopia during this period, revealing some of the political, economic, social, cultural, legal and religious aspects of daily life. This inscription was found by A.F. Drewes in 1955, in Safra, not far from the ancient site of Coloë in the governorate-general of Eritrea. It consists of four texts engraved on a small granite stone, about 24 cm. wide. On one side, there are three columns and there is one more on the reverse. The first text occupies the left-hand and middle columns on the front of the stone, the second text consists of the first seven lines of the right-hand column and below it is the third text. The fourth text is found on the left side of the back of the stone. A. Drewes classifies these texts as A, B, C, D.¹⁰¹ Each text is independent of the others; but it is possible that all four were issued by one and the same emperor (one after another) to different

93. A. Jamme, *Sabaeen Inscriptions*, JA 576/3.

94. *Ibid.*, JA 577/3.

95. *Ibid.*, JA 585/5-8.

96. H. von Wissmann, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 401.

97. A. Jamme, *Sabaeen Inscriptions*, JA 577/6.

98. H. von Wissmann, "Himyar", p. 452.

99. *Idem*, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 191.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

101. A.J. Drewes, *Inscriptions*, p. 31.

people of his Empire. In spite of the fact that the content is clear in its general outline, we have not succeeded in classifying it definitively as a prescription of offerings to a god or as an imperial order concerning payment of taxes. Since the emperor as the son of a god, acted as high priest, and at the same time as political leader, he embodied absolute legislative power and it was possible to assume both. Neither the name of the emperor nor that of the god is mentioned in these four columns. The emperor issued anonymously these decrees which governed a particular society within his empire.

Text A, line 3 ሰብዓት ሕግ (seventh law) gives the impression that the emperor issued a series of decrees. As the supreme power he was the recipient of the major share of taxes. The tax is defined in kind and money; since the former consisted largely of agricultural and pastoral products, one can assume that the law was designed for the peasants. The word 'law' appears in the text twice as a noun and once as a verb. The same term has been used up to the present day in Ethiopia. Another striking point is the use of number in words only. Figures had not yet been adapted from the Greek alphabet. If we assume that items mentioned in the text were offerings, then sacrifices consisted of animals and agricultural products. These were not burned, but distributed to different people of different social rank, throughout the social hierarchy. The act is known as ተከር: memorandum and still is practised in Ethiopia in a slightly different way.

In this period Ge'ez and Greek inscriptions were used alternatively. We have the inscription of Deqe-Mehari, a north Eritrean village on the road to Keren. It belongs to the king of Aksum, Sembrouthes. All eight lines are legible. It was found in 1901 by the Swedish missionary Sundström. With this inscription were found two more fragments of Greek inscriptions which had not previously been brought to light.¹⁰² The inhabitant of this village assured him that in that place, many Greek inscriptions were available. However, so far we have not heard of any further inscriptions being found there.¹⁰³

The content is:

- 1) King of Kin-¹⁰⁴
- 2) gs of Aksum-
- 3) ites Great
- 4) Sembrouthes
- 5) came [and] set
- 6) up this stone in the year 24
- 7) of Sembrouthes the Great
- 8) King

This inscription differs from the previous ones in that the title of the king is 'King of Kings' and 'Great'. Why he held these titles is not mentioned here. All that can be said is that he was the first king known to have received these titles, especially the appellation 'great' which is not even used by Ezana and Caleb later. He is the only known Aksumite emperor who styled himself as 'the great'. If we do not know about the greatness of this king from internal sources, at least we know from external sources that the country, in that century, was known as a great power. Manni, a Christian author of the same century of Persian origin, writes that at that time there were four great kingdoms in the world

102. DAE, vol. IV, p. 3; E. Littmann, "Preliminary Report of the Princeton University Expedition to Abyssinia": ZA. 20 (1909), p. 170; C. Conti Rossini, "Aethiopica IIe serie": RSO. 10 (1925), pp. 491-49.

103. My personal survey on the spot in 1965 produced no effective results.

104. The preposition 'ek' is an unnecessary addition of the technician, or perhaps it reflects his imprecise knowledge of the language.

the first one of Babylon and Persia, the second of Rome, the third of Aksum, and the fourth one of Silis (China).¹⁰⁵

Although Sembrouthes is called 'great' we have no coins minted with his name.¹⁰⁶ Conti Rossini doubts whether he was of Semitic origin. He says this name sounds more Hamitic.¹⁰⁷ If we search for a similar name in the lists of the kings we find Ella Semra who reigned in the third century. A.D. The period coincides with Sembrouthes, but Ella Semra reigned for only three years, whereas Sembrouthes reigned more than 24 years. The date of the reign of Sembrouthes is believed to be before 287 and there is a tendency to identify him with Samir Yuharis of the Sabaeen inscription.¹⁰⁸ Most probably the king came here to thank his god and to build a temple. The occasion of this dedication is not mentioned. The whole tone of the inscription does not give the impression that it was in celebration of a triumph in war. The absence of the war god Ares from the text is another indication that it was a peaceful occasion.

(b) Coins

In addition to the inscriptions we also have coins as a primary source of the history of Ethiopia in the third century. During that time when the Romans were dominant in the world, the only country, at least on the African continent which minted coins, was the Aksumite empire. The shape and the size of Aksumite coins was similar to that of the Roman, especially those of the Mediterranean world of the second half of the third century.¹⁰⁹ In the beginning the legends of the coins were written in Greek. This is explained by the fact that the Greek language was at least the semi-official language in this country. Moreover, Greek was also the commercial language all over the world as English is today. In other words, it was the *lingua franca* of the ancient world.

When and by whom the minting of coins in Ethiopia was begun we do not yet know. In the Ge'ez inscription of Safra, there is a hint of the existence of coins in Ethiopia.¹¹⁰ The evidence that we have shows that in the third century there were Ethiopian kings who minted coins—Aphilas, Endybis, Ousanas I and Wazeba. (The experts are not unanimous in their opinions about the order of these kings. Some believe that Aphilas was the predecessor of Endybis or vice-versa). For Aphilas, we find an equivalent name Felya or Filia in the royal lists of Ethiopian kings. He is the sixteenth king after Bazen.¹¹¹ The name is Semitic and confirmed by Nabatian and Syrian graffiti.¹¹² We possess gold, silver and bronze coins of Aphilas; on the obverse is written in Greek "*Aphilas king*" and on the reverse "*of Aksumites Bisi Dimele*". Above the head of the effigy of the emperor there are the crescent and disc, the South Arabian symbols of the gods. So these coins combine two cultures,

105. H. Ibscher, *Manichaäische Inschriften der staatlichen Museen Berlin*, (Stuttgart, 1940), pp. 188–190; U. Monneret de Villard, "Aksum e i quattro re del mondo": *Annali Lateranensi*, 12 (1948), pp. 125–180; J. Doresse, *L'Empire*, vol. I, p. 119; A. Caquot et J. Leclant, "Éthiopie et Cyrénaïque ? à propos d'un texte de Synésios": *AE* 3 (1959), p. 177.

106. J. Ryckmans states that Sembrouthes was an Emperor attested to by the coins. ("Chronologie", p. 84). Here I must confess my ignorance.

107. C. Conti Rossini, *Storia*, p. 120.

108. J. Ryckmans, "Chronologie", p. 84; Drewes, *Inscriptions*, pp. 106–107.

109. A. Anzani, "Numismatica e storia d'Etiopia": *Rivista italiana di numismatica*, vols. V and VI, (1928, 1929), pp. 10–11; de Contenson, "Les premiers rois", p. 83; C. Conti Rossini, "Monete aksumite": *Africa Italiana* 1 (1927), pp. 182–183.

110. The inscription mentions *birur*, which means a silver coin or simply money. See A.J. Drewes, *Inscriptions*, pp. 53–54.

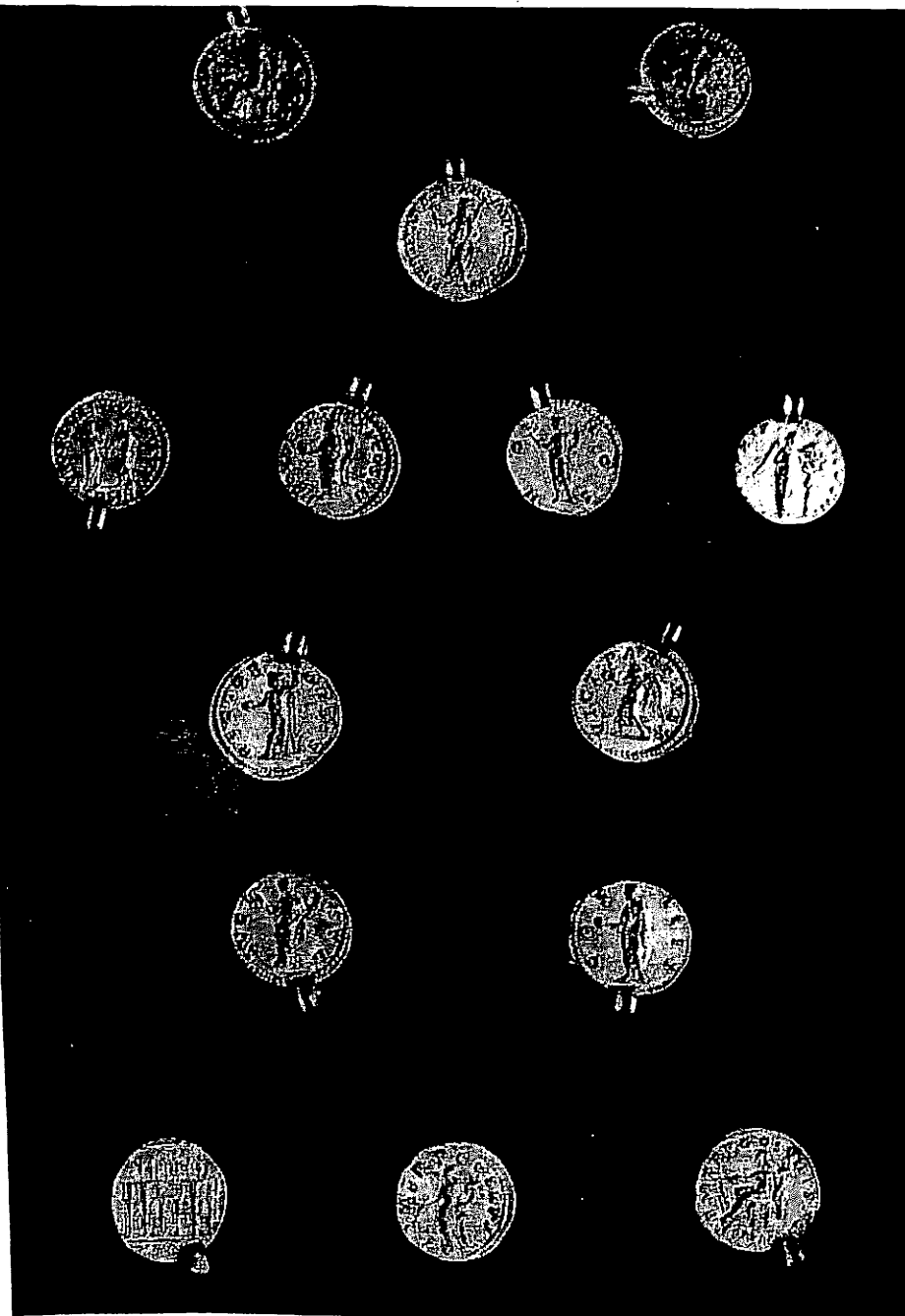
111. C. Conti Rossini, "Les listes", pp. 278–288; *DAE*, vol. I, p. 4.

112. *Idem*, "Monete aksumite", p. 189.



Silver coin of Endybis, 3rd cent. A. D.

Photo: Institute of Eih. Archaeol



Roman coins with earrings discovered at Matara.

Photo: Institute of Eth. Archaeology

showing the influence of the Greek language and South Arabian religion. On the obverse, there is a bust of the emperor with his face in right profile. Some gold coins of him show a crown on his head; in his hand a sword and in his ear, an earring. He is surrounded with corn on both sides. On the reverse, there is another bust of the king facing the same direction, but without a crown and in his hand he holds three branches of palm leaves. This has given occasion for some writers to think that the reverse side refers to another person.¹¹³ But the continuity of the legend on both sides leaves no doubt that both effigies belong to the same king. In addition to that, we have other gold and bronze coins of the same Emperor, without crown, on whose obverse side is engraved the Candelabra Euphorbia like the Roman coins of the time. But it is remarkable that his head is covered with a piece of cloth, as was still the custom, in recent times, of the Emperor Menelik II. It is a general phenomenon on all Ethiopian coins; when the Emperor does not bear the crown, his head is covered with a piece of cloth. But why is he represented on one side with a crown and on the reverse without the crown and sword? Tekle-Sadik Mekuria gave this explanation: "On the front he is represented with crown and sword to show his royal power and his severity to the disobedient; on reverse he is shown with a palm tree to indicate his merciful attitude to those who are peaceful".¹¹⁴ This is, of course, a logical interpretation which explains that one side is intended to show his absolute power while the other side shows that he is also peace-loving. About the reverse legend, *Bisi Demele*, there is no unanimous explanation. E. Littmann¹¹⁵ believes it to be a name of a province or a certain division of the army, while Conti Rossini would see it as an attribute of the Emperor in combination with *Bisi*.¹¹⁶ Compared with other inscriptions, particularly with the Ge'ez inscription found at Berenice, it seems to be a place name.¹¹⁷

The coins of Endybis are larger in size than those of Aphilas. The gold coins weigh 2.6 gr. and 2.77 gr. The name of the tribe is *Dakhy*. The legend is written in Greek and in many ways these coins are similar to those of Aphilas. The name Endybis could be identified with a name in the lists of the kings: Hendor is quite similar to Endybis.¹¹⁸ Ousanas minted coins of gold and silver. The size is large, 2.65 gr. On both sides there is the bust of the Emperor; on obverse with crown and on reverse without. The legend is written in Greek and reads: "Ousanas, King of Aksumites man of Gisene". Above the bust there is the crescent and disc. The name cannot be identified with any of the names in the lists of the kings. The peculiarity of Ousanas' coins lies in the new additional symbol engraved above and below the crescent and disc, seven dots on the obverse and six on the reverse.¹¹⁹

The fourth pagan Emperor of Aksum who minted coins was Wazeba I. His coins differ little from the previous two Emperors in technique, but he was perhaps the first ruler to use Ge'ez for the legend. He minted coins in gold and silver. The gold coin of Wazeba is very similar in design to that of Aphilas and has the same decoration: on the obverse, the bust bears a crown and on the reverse is uncrowned but the head is covered properly with a piece of cloth. On both sides of the silver coin the effigy of the Emperor is uncrowned. The legend does not include the tribal name. The identification of this

113. Conti Rossini believes that the bust without a crown may have belonged to the son or brother of the emperor or the viceroy of South Arabia. (*op. cit.*, p. 180.)

114. *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia, Aksum and the Zagway*, (Addis Ababa, 1958), p. 213.

115. *DAE*, vol. I, p. 42.

116. Conti Rossini, *Storia*, p. 129; *Idem*, "Monete aksumite", p. 189.

117. See below p. 109.

118. Conti Rossini, "Les listes", p. 277.

119. *Idem*, "Monete aksumite", p. 182.

name with Adbah, found in a South Arabian inscription, is quite possible.¹²⁰ In this case, one can assume that all four Emperors ruled before the end of the third century.

No doubt, the coins were minted in the territory of the Aksumite Empire and even the technique used was most probably Aksumite. Now the question here is whether foreigners were employed for this purpose in Ethiopia at that time. This has not been confirmed but it is quite possible. At any rate, if we compare the coins of Aksum with those of the Romans we realize that there is a similarity between the two. On the other hand, it is an established fact that the inhabitants of Aksum even today are famous for their ability in creating fine art and jewellery.

The materials, gold, silver and bronze, are local and foreign. Some gold coins are red in colour while some are pale. The red gold was from Ethiopia, while the pale gold was brought from Nubia.¹²¹ Silver was imported from South Arabia.¹²² The last item, bronze, most probably came from India through commercial channels.¹²³

Another question which can be raised is the aim of minting coins in the Aksumite Empire. In the main, the object did not differ from the other countries which used coins, i.e., it was to facilitate internal and external trade. But, in Ethiopia, since internal trade was conducted with salt and iron, it would follow that the Aksumite coins were used mainly for international trade, and this may be the main reason why foreign coins are not found in Ethiopia as elsewhere in Africa and Asia.¹²⁴ It was not however the same case in the previous century before the Aksumites started to mint coins. In the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, it is mentioned that there was only a small amount of foreign coins imported into Ethiopia.¹²⁵ From some South Arabian coins found near Aksum one can infer that such coins were in circulation here before the Aksumites started to mint their own in the third century.¹²⁶

(c) Commerce

At this time, because of the available facilities, trade flourished in the Aksumite Empire, and this was not only with the Graeco-Roman world, but also with the East. The South Arabian inscriptions of this century contain many references to the heavy traffic between Ethiopia and South Arabia. We hear not only of frequent exchanges of envoys, but also about transportation of troops from the African coast, from Adulis, to South Arabia. Such a project would of course demand a large variety of transportation. As one of the four big powers, Aksum had transport vessels in number, not only for military purposes but also for trade on a large scale.

Eastern trade remains to be looked at. During the Han dynasty (220-589) of China, commerce flourished between China and the Red Sea basin, particularly the African coast. According to the chronicles of the Han dynasty, Chinese ships visited the Red Sea coun-

120. Pirenne, "L'inscription 'Ryckmans 535' et la chronologie sud-arabe": *Muséon* 69 (1956), p. 165 ff; G. Ryckmans, *Inscriptions sud-arabes*, *Muséon* 69 (1956), p. 148.

121. Conti Rossini, "Monete aksumite", p. 184.

122. *Ibid.*

123. See the table of imports above, pp. 73-74.

124. Very few Greek or Roman coins have been unearthed so far in Ethiopia; one of Constantine the Great was found at Cohaito; some Roman coins found in northern Ethiopia include one of the Emperor Diocletian found at Aksum, and another bearing the head of a horse, but with legend, from Halai. See C. Conti Rossini, "Monete aksumite", pp. 179-180.

125. *Periplus*, 6.

126. J. Doresse, *Ethiopia*, p. 37; C. Conti Rossini, "Monete", p. 179.

tries. The journey from China to the farthest country of this area took twelve months, and this land was called the kingdom of Huang-Chi. The countries on the route from China developed trading relations with other countries and, to facilitate trade, they had interpreters.

Who were the Huang-Chi? A. Herrmann, a German scholar, has identified Huang-Chi with the Ag'azian. At that time the Aksumite kingdom was at a peak of prosperity and power and possessed many great ships. Moreover, the main centre of east and west trade was Adulis. In view of this, the possibility of conducting long-distance trade existed. The Huang-Chi were a people or a country located at a distance of twelve months' journey or 30,000 li (c.15,000 kms.). Therefore, it could not have been India or any other country which is closer to China. The products of Huang-Chi are also identical with those mentioned in the *Periplus*: live rhinoceros and rhinoceros horn, tortoise-shell and ivory, all Ethiopian products.¹²⁷ The possibility is therefore strongly in favour of this commercial relationship between Ethiopia and China.

Concerning the trade with India at that time, the names Ethiopia and India were interchanged more than ever. When the Graeco-Roman authors spoke of India, they understood Ethiopia and vice versa. The reason was that Graeco-Roman contacts with the East were declining. They were not in a position to travel to India, so they limited themselves to trade to and from Adulis. The Indian trade was left to the Ethiopians. The Ethiopians travelled to India to bring back the products of that region. On their return they delivered them to the Greeks who were waiting in Adulis, thus the whole of Indian commerce was in the hands of the Ethiopians. But the Greek and Roman merchants who took these Indian articles from the Ethiopians, assumed that they had gone to India or had come from India to publicize their goods. The people who bought Indian products also confused the names of Ethiopia and India. But the most telling evidence of close commercial ties with India lies in the discovery of a hoard of one hundred and four Kushana gold coins found at Debre Damo in 1940. Of the coins found at the monastery five were double gold denaries of King Vima Kadphises II, another five were gold denaries of Kaniska, eighty-eight belonged to Huviska and the remaining six to Vasudeva I, who came to the throne about 220 A.D. No Roman or Persian coins were found. The export of such a large number of Indian coins cannot have been for decorative purposes. It is possible that Aksumite coins did not exist at that time and that Indian coins were in circulation in the Aksumite Empire. On the other hand, the coins found at Debra Damo may have been the property of someone who had travelled to India.¹²⁸

As far as commerce with the western world is concerned, Kimble gives us the following details: "By the end of the third century, the forces of disruption had so far gripped the Empire, that it was no longer the sole guardian of these great trade routes. Traffic with the Far East slowly passed into the hands of the intermediaries: Persians, Abyssinians, the Himyarites of the Yemen. The Persians secured a monopoly of the Chinese silk trade, while the Abyssinians and Himyarites became the main carriers of the Indian trade. African trade was mainly in slaves, ivory and precious metals, and also

127. According to the German scholar, A. Herrmann, the Chinese Emperor Wang-Mang (1-6 A.D.) sent messengers to Huang Chi with gifts and he in turn received a live rhinoceros from the King of Huang Chi. (A. Herrmann, "Ein alter Seeverkehr zwischen Abessinien und Süd-China bis zum Beginn unserer Zeitrechnung": *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft fuer Erdkunde*, (1913), pp. 553-561).

128. A. Mordini, "Gli aurei Kushana del convento di Dabra Dammo. Un'indizio sui rapporti commerciali fra l'India e l'Etiopia nei primi secoli dell'era volgare": *ACISE* (Rome, 1960), p. 253; Yu. M. Kobischanov, "The Sea Voyages of Ancient Ethiopians in the Indian Ocean": *PICES* (Addis Ababa, 1966), p. 22.

fell into the hands of the Abyssinians." 129

5. Political Relations with the Roman Empire

The political relations between the Aksumite and the Roman Empires were generally indirect, taking place through the intermediary of another kingdom. Between Mesopotamia and Arabia, there was the kingdom of Palmyra. This kingdom was located between the two great rival empires, Byzantine and Persian, who fought most of the time for their economic and political interests. It was not possible for the Palmyran kingdom to remain neutral and to watch two powers engage in confrontation. The Roman Emperor had his seat rather far from Palmyra, although his Empire expanded to the frontier of that country. On the contrary, the empire of Persia was very near in every respect and Palmyra chose this country through which to strengthen its political and commercial relations. The kings of Palmyra in the third century were capable of guiding their country to prosperity. The best known in this regard is Odenathus II, who was killed in 266-267. His son Luluabalat was still a little child, and the queen-mother, Zenobia, became the actual ruler of Palmyra as co-regent with her child. She was strong enough to capture some areas of Roman territory. The governor of Egypt and Asia, Zabdas, tried to recapture the lost territory without success. The fact that Zenobia defeated the Roman army made the kingdom of Palmyra famous.

As mentioned in the book of Manni, Ethiopia at that time was known as one of the four great powers, and we therefore should note relations between Palmyra and Ethiopia. In *Historia Augusta*,¹³⁰ it is mentioned that when Aurelian invaded and captured Palmyra in 274, he took Ethiopian prisoners. He called them by their political name, Aksumites. The question here is in what capacity the Ethiopians went to Palmyra. From the book, it is not possible to say definitely that they went there to help the Palmyreans. No doubt the possibility was there that the Aksumite Empire at that time was in a position to supply soldiers and war material to any country which needed help. The well-known historian, Conti Rossini, suggested that between Aksum and Palmyra there was an alliance at that time.¹³¹ In his opinion, the Aksumite navy occupied the Roman territory which was around the Red Sea and prevented the Romans from claiming their tribute. But the motive for this alliance is not clear. At that time Roman commerce to the East was declining. The Aksumites took over this trade and the profit accruing from it. Although one state often declared war against another when they were political and economic rivals, this was not the case between the Roman and the Aksumite Empires. Moreover, had the Aksumite Empire made an alliance with Palmyra, it would have greatly damaged its interests. Then the presence of the Ethiopians in Palmyra must be interpreted in another way. The Ethiopians had relations with other countries, as they had had with the Graeco-Roman world. Their representatives were to be found in every place where they had interests, and so Ethiopian traders were also in Palmyra during the occupation of Aurelian, and he himself was unable to distinguish between the merchants and soldiers.¹³² However, to enhance his glory and prestige he took them as prisoners to Rome to appear in his triumph. Together with the Ethiopians, he also took Arabs, Indians, Bactrians, Iberians, Saracens and Persians. Whether he had indeed defeated all these peoples in battle as allies of Palmyra is doubtful. The most probable

129. G. Kimble, *Geography in the Middle Ages*, (London, 1938), p.12.

130. Vit. Aur. 33.4. *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, ed. Hohl.

131. C. Conti Rossini, *Storia*, p. 124; Cf. "Aksum e Palmira: Aethiopica IIe Serie": *RSO* 10 (1925), pp. 496-497.

132. If we re-examine this question perhaps we may speculate that, unlike the Ahabis, they were mercenaries who had voluntarily joined the army of Zenobia.

explanation is that they were all merchants who had gone to Palmyra to sell the product of their countries. The following paragraph probably reveals the actual relations of the Romans to the Aksumites.

We find direct political contacts with the Roman Empire by the end of the third century, during the time of Diocletian. The external policy of Diocletian was to maintain the expanded frontiers of the Empire which had been established by Augustus, and hence occasionally he visited the boundaries for inspection. He came then to visit the boundary south of Egypt. When he arrived in Elephantine, different peoples who paid tribute to Rome, came and offered him gifts. The contemporary author, Heliodorus, tells us that the Aksumites also came with presents to Diocletian, but he commented further that they did this not in the sense of tribute, but because they were friends and allies of the Romans: "Finally the envoys of the Aksumites appeared, these were not tributary but friends and allies of the king. To mark their pleasure at his success, they too brought presents and among other things a marvelous animal of extraordinary appearance".¹³³ We hear for the first time now, about the alliance of the Aksumite Empire with Rome. This event is ignored, however, by the available Ethiopian sources. In some of them it is mentioned that the contemporary Emperor of Ethiopia was Segab, whose throne name was Mehassi. This Emperor is said to have reigned for nine years. Mention is also made of the persecution of the Christians proclaimed by Diocletian and Maximianus: "During the reign of this Emperor there arose the wicked Diocletian in Antioch and Maximianus in Rome. And these two occupants of the throne massacred the Christians, closed the churches and opened pagan temples. There was a great persecution of the Church for forty years."¹³⁴

6. Source Material

In this century we find another primary source in the inscription of Matara.¹³⁵ It is in the Ge'ez language in four lines, of which only two can be easily read. It is unvocalized and the content is:

1. ገላውልት ዘእገረ
2. እገዛ ለእገዱ ወሰ
3. ሕብ ሙሐዛተ አውዐ
4. አለፈነ ወጸበለነ

This is the stele that had made
Agaz for his fathers and he subdued
the young and strong men of 'Aw'a
ALFN and SBLN

Whether እገዛ, the man who erected this monument, was king is not mentioned in the inscription. Until this time, the men who had left inscriptions were kings. From palaeographical evidence, the inscription must have been written at the end of the third century. From a philological point of view, we find that Ge'ez had developed as an independent language with its own characters. But this does not mean that it had interrupted its connection with the language it derived from. The vocabulary is more or less the same, so also were the symbols.

Historically, እገዛ did not erect this monument for himself, but for the commemoration of his forefathers. It is not a dedication to the gods, but he mentions as his con-

133. Heliodorus, *Aethiopica*, trans. N. Hadas, (Michigan University Press, 1957), p. 265; C. Conti Rossini, "Meroe ed Aksum nel romanzo di Eliodoro": *RSO* 8 (1919), pp. 233-239.

134. *Chronicle of Ethiopia*, unpublished MS in the possession of Qese Gebez Tekle Haimanot of Aksum.

135. E. Ullendorff, *Exploration and Study of Abyssinia*, (Asmara, 1945), pp. 78-80; *Idem*, "The Obelisk of Matara": *JRAS* (1951); *DAE* vol. IV, pp. 26-32; A.J. Drewes, *Inscriptions de l'Éthiopie antique*, p. 67; J. Halévy, "Inscription éthiopienne de l'obélisque près de Matara": *Revue Sémitique* 4 (1896); C. Conti Rossini, "L'iscrizione dell'obelisco presso Matara": *RRAL* serie 4, vol. V, (1896), pp. 250-253.

tribution to social welfare that he made a canal to bring water for the inhabitants of a certain region. It seems that he belonged to an old and good family which occupied a high rank in society.

The first three Christian centuries had great significance for the Aksumite civilization from many points of view. From a territorial point of view, the Ethiopian dominion extended along both sides of the Red Sea coast. There was a central government headed by an Emperor, whose title was "King of Kings" and whose reputation was world-wide. The Ethiopian realm did not remain culturally dependent on South Arabia and Greece. It developed its own unique culture so that Ethiopia became the only country on the African Continent with its own written language—a language which has developed and remained in use until the present day. This development of a written language is eloquent proof of the degree of civilization attained by the Aksumites. It is also clear that Aksum was a military power of some standing, with generals skilled in the arts of strategy and logistics and perhaps also in possession of highly developed military equipment. For this reason other powers did not attempt to invade Aksumite territory. On the contrary, the Aksumites themselves often followed an aggressive policy. The deep and firm foundation of the Ethiopian state which was laid at that time could not be destroyed by the tempests which arose in the country from time to time.

CHAPTER III

TURNING POINT OF ETHIOPIAN HISTORY

I. Culture and Politics

The unvocalized Ge'ez inscription of Anza illuminates some aspects of the culture and political life of Ethiopia at the beginning of the fourth century.¹ It was found at Mariam Anza where it remains, and concerns the philanthropic work of the king, i.e. he gave bread and wine to his people in time of need. Here is the text tentative vocalized.²

1. ጽሕፈ ብዙት ንጉሠ	Has written <i>Bizet</i> King of
2. አጋቦ ዝሐውልት	<i>Agabo</i> [on] this stele
3. ዚአሁ ስሐቦ	of his own after he had subdued
4. ሕዝቡ አጋቦ አተወ ቆዐት	the people of <i>Agabo</i> he came in Qo'at
5. በ፲፰ ዕለታት	in fifteen days
6. ሥዋህ አሰየ ፪፻ወ፳	and donated 520 jars of beer
7. ጽሕባተ ወጎብስተ አሰየ	and bread he gave
8. ፳፻፻ ወ፪፻ ወ፳	20,620

The first four lines of this inscription are similar to the inscription of Matara and the remaining four to that of Safra. But the inscription of Anza presents a further development in philology; it is more accurate and precise in expression. The inscription of Matara uses the predict 'gbr' while that of Anza uses 'shf' which is more accurate. Stylistically speaking, *shf/bzt/ngs/gb/zhwlt* is far more comprehensible than *zhwlt/z'gbr'g*. In both inscriptions *hwlt* and *shb* are used. It happens similarly with the inscription of Safra: 'sy/swh/shb' and *hbst* are identical in both inscriptions, the only difference being that numerals in Anza are written in figures and those in Safra written in words.

From the inscription it is clear that Bizet was the king of Agabo. Concerning the same Agabo, it is certainly true that Agabo was the name of an ethnic group which at the course of time became a toponym.³ This fact can be very easily confirmed from the text itself. The identity of the king presents a problem. In the inscription, there is no indication whether he was an Aksumite king. In the Ethiopian lists of kings, there is no such name. However, his dominion took about fifteen days' journey to cross which does indicate that it was a vast kingdom. It is most probable that the kings of Aksum had

1. Drewes thinks that this inscription is older than that of Matara (*Inscriptions*, p. 65). For philological and palaeographical reasons I prefer the beginning of the fourth century.

2. Conti Rossini, "Un'iscrizione sul obelisco di Anza": *RSE* 2 (1942), pp. 21–28; E. Littmann, "L'iscrizione di Anza": *RSE* 11 (1952), pp. 5–8; A.J. Drewes, *Inscriptions*, pp. 65–67; Sergew Hable-Selassie, *Beziehungen*, pp. 45–46.

3. According to J. Doresse this site is located north of Asbi in Eastern Tigré. See map in "La découverte d'Asbi-Dera, nouveaux documents sur les rapports entre l'Égypte et l'Éthiopie à l'époque aksumite" *ACISE* (1960), p. 412.

title of 'King of Kings' by that time, and 'King' was given to subordinate rulers who were governors of certain provinces.

Another important aspect of this inscription is the appearance of numerals in Ethiopia. In the previous Ge'ez inscriptions, numbers were written in words only, but now we find them being written in figures. Actually this numeral system was inherited from Greek without any change. In ancient times, the Greeks used the letters of their alphabet as numbers by employing two lines above and below the letters; likewise when the Ethiopians adopted the Greek letters as numerals,⁴ they adopted the same signs above and below the numeral. Although superfluous, these signs are still used today.

Greek Numerals		Ge'ez Numerals		Arabic Numerals	
α	ια	አ	Ἰአ	1	11
β	κ	፩	፩	2	20
γ	λ	፪	፪	3	30
δ	μ	፫	፫	4	40
ε	ν	፬	፬	5	50
στ	ξ	፭	፭	6	60
ζ	ο	፮	፮	7	70
η	π	፯	፯	8	80
θ	—	፰	፰	9	90
ι	ρ	፱	፱	10	100

It is interesting to note that in Ge'ez the small letters were used to form the numerals up to one hundred and the symbol for one hundred was combined with the first ten numerals to express two hundred, three hundred, etc. This does not occur in Greek numeration. However, the names of numerals in Ethiopia remain Semitic. No doubt the South Arabian immigrants had their own numerals, but whether they used symbols is not yet confirmed by inscriptions in Ethiopia. The inscription of Safra suggests rather the absence of symbols. This might be the reason why the Ethiopians later were obliged to borrow Greek numerals. At any rate, the development indicates a combination of Greek and Sabacan elements.

The existence of numerals in any form in Ethiopia implies the existence of chronology at that time; the phrase "fifteen days" is evidence of this concept. The two previous Greek inscriptions of Adulis and Sembrouthes also give the length of the reign of both sovereigns in years. But the question is what was the basis of this chronology? Since we lack evidence this question cannot yet be satisfactorily answered.

From an economic point of view, this inscription indicates that the country in this respect was well-off. The king gave a big reception for the people; he served beer and bread in large quantities, which is a sign of a prosperous life. In addition, mention is made of certain utensils, diet and drinks, which illustrate the domestic life of Ethiopians at that time.

As H. von Wissmann assumes, towards the end of the third century Ethiopia had lost its overseas territory because of internal revolt. But this setback seems to have been of short duration and at the beginning of the fourth century we find Aksum controlling its previous territories on both sides. Once again, because of the mutilation of source

4. R. Hall, "Ueber die griechischen Zahlbuchstaben und ihre Verbreitung": ZDMG 80 (1926), p. 26 ff.

material, we are not able to decipher with any certainty the name of the emperor who ruled at that time. We have, however, definite evidence of the names of two emperors who ruled before Ezana; they were Ousanas and Ella Amida. The latter was the father of Ezana. The former is confirmed by his coins which are of reformed Constantine style,⁵ (306 A.D.) and the latter we know from the inscriptions of Ezana.⁶ Furthermore, if we investigate closely certain Aksumite coins of pre-Christian times, we may be able to identify them with Ella Amida.⁷

The Greek inscription which was found on the way from Meroe to Aksum in 1909 by A. Sayce reads as follows:⁸

- 1) (.βασιλεὺς (?) τῶν Ἀξου)μελτων καὶ Ὀμηρειτῶ(ν)
- 2)..... (ἔμπροσθεν ?) Ἀρεως ἀντιδίκησαν τ (?).....
- 3)..... (αὐτ) ὃν παρακούσας ἀπὸ τῆς
- 4)..... ε (?) ἐλοις καὶ ἐξεπόρθησα τὰς
- 5)..... (τῷ κατ) α κλειθὲν παρελθὼν ἐν ἑ.....
- 6)..... γεννᾶται ἕτερον δὲ κα.....
- 7)..... σὺν τῷ βασιλεῖ μέχρι τ(οῦ)
- 8)..... (τὰ) ἅγια εἰς τὰ ἐν τῇ σεκ.....
- 9)..... ἀτηγοὺς καὶ τέκνα.....
- 10).....(παρ) ἤλθον αὐτὰ.....
- 11)..... ὅ(?) σομαι οἴκι(ς).....
- 12)..... ἐπὶ φοροῖ.....
- 13)..... χαλκον
- 14)..... ων καὶ
 1. (The King?) of the Axumites and Homerites
 2. ... (before) Ares they contented...
 3. ...having heard him, from the ... (I departed)
 4. ...and I devastated the (upper lands?) ...
 5. ... (I) having passed by (the sanctuary that is) closed.
 6. ...it is produced, and another ...
 7. ...along with the king as far as the ...
 8. ... (the) holy things (or places) to the king in the...
 9. ...goats and children
 10. ...I passed them (by) ...
 11. ...houses ...
 12. ...carring ...
 13. ...copper (or bronze)
 14. ...and

Generally speaking, from the text it is clear that the man who left the inscription was Emperor of the Aksumites and Himyarites. Whether the other kingdoms of South Arabia were included, we are not able to confirm because of the fragmented character

5. H. de Contenson, "Les premiers rois", p. 83.

6. DAE, vol. IV, pp. 19, 24, 28 and 32.

7. DAE, vol. I, p. 47.

8. A. Sayce, "A Greek Inscription of a King (?) of Axum found at Meroe": *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, 31, (1909).

of the inscription; but there is space to assume that they were. In line three, 'having heard' should be altered to 'having disobeyed' to get the real sense of the inscription. Hence the Emperor undertook personally an expedition against Meroë because of the disobedience of the inhabitants and destroyed it. The king, the inhabitants and their children were taken captive and their property was plundered and taken as booty. For the commemoration of the victory, the Emperor dedicated a bronze statue to his personal god, Ares.

The identity of this king who destroyed Meroë remains a matter for conjecture. From Meroë itself no evidence has been found so far to enable us to reconstruct the events leading up to its fall and ultimate destruction or to determine when this event occurred. The old assumption that Ezana had destroyed the city has rightly been abandoned⁹ because by 350 Ezana had already become a Christian king and had renounced the worship of Ares; secondly, in his last inscription he does not mention anything about a previous expedition to Nubia; thirdly, if we compare the titles of the king of the Meroë inscriptions with those of Ezana we find marked differences. For example, the titles of Ezana take more space, covering four lines 32 cm. in length while the titles of the king of the Meroë inscription take only one line. It is most likely that the predecessor of Ezana, his father Ella-Amida, undertook this expedition to Meroë. Since in the same inscription the emperor styled himself as King of the Himyarites (Homerites), it is logical to think that he asserted his sovereignty over South Arabia and thus his successor Ezana would have continued to rule this overseas territory in tranquillity.

2. The Reign of Ezana

The prosperity and power of Aksum reached its zenith during the time of Ezana. Moreover, with the reign of Ezana, for the first time in Ethiopian history a comparatively detailed record of the events of the period is available to scholars. The sources for this reign are clearer and more abundant than before. The history of Ezana is well-documented through inscriptions in three languages, on coins and in the writings of various foreign authors, as well as in traditional literature. Thus the gap left by one source is filled by another.

The primary sources (inscriptions and coins) provide us with some biographical information concerning this emperor. Here Ezana appears as the sole ruler of Aksum: he had, of course, two brothers who held high administrative posts as generals, nevertheless, there is no indication that they were co-regents. His father was Ella-Amida, from the tribe of Halen. There is no further information about this tribe but it is referred to both in inscriptions and on coins. From the trilingual inscription (Sabaeen, Ge'ez and Greek), we can infer that he had had a broad education. It is likely that Frumen-tius played an important part in educating Ezana during the period of his first stay in Aksum as a captive.

The early history of Ezana can be reconstructed from different legends, in particular from the *Gedle Abreha and Asbeha*, which I have recently copied from the Church of Abreha and Arbeha in Tigré.¹⁰ According to the book, its author was Abba Selama and the copyists were Tekle Haimanot and Gebre Meskal who translated books from Arabic (*sic*) into Ge'ez during the reign of the twin brothers, Abreha and Asbeha. At the beginning of the book, it is emphasized that the two brothers ruled at the same time in

9. In this connection P.L. Shinnie says: "that the campaign (of Ezana) was not to destroy Meroë, but to put down a revolt by the Noba, who were in possession of the island of Meroë": *Meroë*, (London, 1967), p. 55; *idem*, "The Fall of Meroë": *Kush* 3 (1955), pp. 82-85; U. Monneret de Villard, *Storia della Nubia cristiana*, (Rome, 1935), p. 37; F. Hintze suggests 320 A.D. as the date of the final fall of Meroë: "Studien zur meroitischen Chronologie und zu den Opfertafeln aus den Pyramiden von Meroë": *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Klasse fuer Sprachen, Literatur und Kunst*, Jahrg. 1959, n. 2, p. 30.

10. It has not yet been published.

unity. And according to this book, their father was called Tazena and their mother, Sophia.¹¹ The inscription of Ezana says that his father was Ella-Amida. This is confirmed in some lists of Ethiopian kings: for example, according to the list of Azewa Mariam Zegué, Ella-Amida ruled the country for thirty years and ten months. In a short history of the kings which has been found in Aksum, it is stated that Ella-Amida ruled for more than 30 years.¹² The parents of the two brothers accepted monotheism. As they had no children, the people were anxious about the continuity of the Solomonic line and some revolted against the king. After a long time, through prayer, the Queen gave birth to twin sons. On the eighth day the children were circumcized and named አገገገ, or *Azguagua*, 'removal'. After some years, they were put in the temple of Aksum under the protection of the high priest, because the mother had vowed to dedicate them to God. The mother was named Ahiyewa and she ruled for three years, and the brothers grew up in the temple. One day St. Michael appeared and told the high priest to crown the two brothers at once as joint rulers of the country. But the high priest, Inberem, refused to do so on the ground that it was not customary at all in Ethiopia for two kings to rule simultaneously. But the angel of God said that it was the will of God and the priest should comply with it. Inberem gathered the people together and told them of the message he had received from the angel. Obviously, the people opposed him at first, but finally agreed that he should obey the angel's command. After that, another difficulty arose immediately. At first the two children refused to ascend the throne; saying that, as they were dedicated to God, they ought to finish their earthly life serving God only and secondly, that it was contrary to established custom to have two kings. However, through the persuasion of the angel, they finally agreed to be crowned and to rule the country together. One should stress the point that it is the only tradition so far which emphasizes the simultaneous accession of two kings.

We find some indication about the early life of Ezana in the description by Rufinus of the introduction of Christianity. Actually, he does not mention any name; however, it is said that "the king died leaving his wife with an infant son as heir of the bereaved kingdom".¹³ That Ezana had brothers has been mentioned already. It must be emphasized here that in the literary sources, i.e., in the letter of Constantius, *Saizana*¹⁴ appears as co-regent of the Aksumite empire. The Emperor Constantius addressed the letter to the "honourable brothers Ezana and Saizana". This information coincides with traditional sources. We know from the inscriptions that Ezana sent his brothers, Hadebas and Saizana, to fight against the Kasu tribes in the north. The first inscription of Ezana, according to E. Liffmann, was written in the first half of the fourth century.¹⁵ It is a trilingual inscription in Greek, Sabaeen and Ge'ez:

Pagan Inscription of Ezana

- 1 'Ezana, the son of Ella 'Amida of the family of
- 2 Halen, King of Aksum, and of Hemar (Himyar),
- 3 and of Raydan, and of Sab' and of Sal-
- 4 hen, and of Seyamo, and of Bega, and of Kasu,
- 5 the son of Mahram, who cannot be conquered by the
- 6 enemy. He made war on the Sarane, whose kingdom is 'A-

11. On another occasion she was called *Ahiyewa*.

12. The booklet was generously given to me by Qese Gebez Tekle Haimanot of Aksum.

13. Translation from A. Jones and E. Monroe, *A History of Ethiopia*, (London, 1955), p. 26.

14. Athanasius, *Apologia*, *Migne PG*, vol. XXV, col. 636 trans. Jan-M. Szymusiak, pp. 125-126.

15. *DAE*, vol. IV, p. 4.

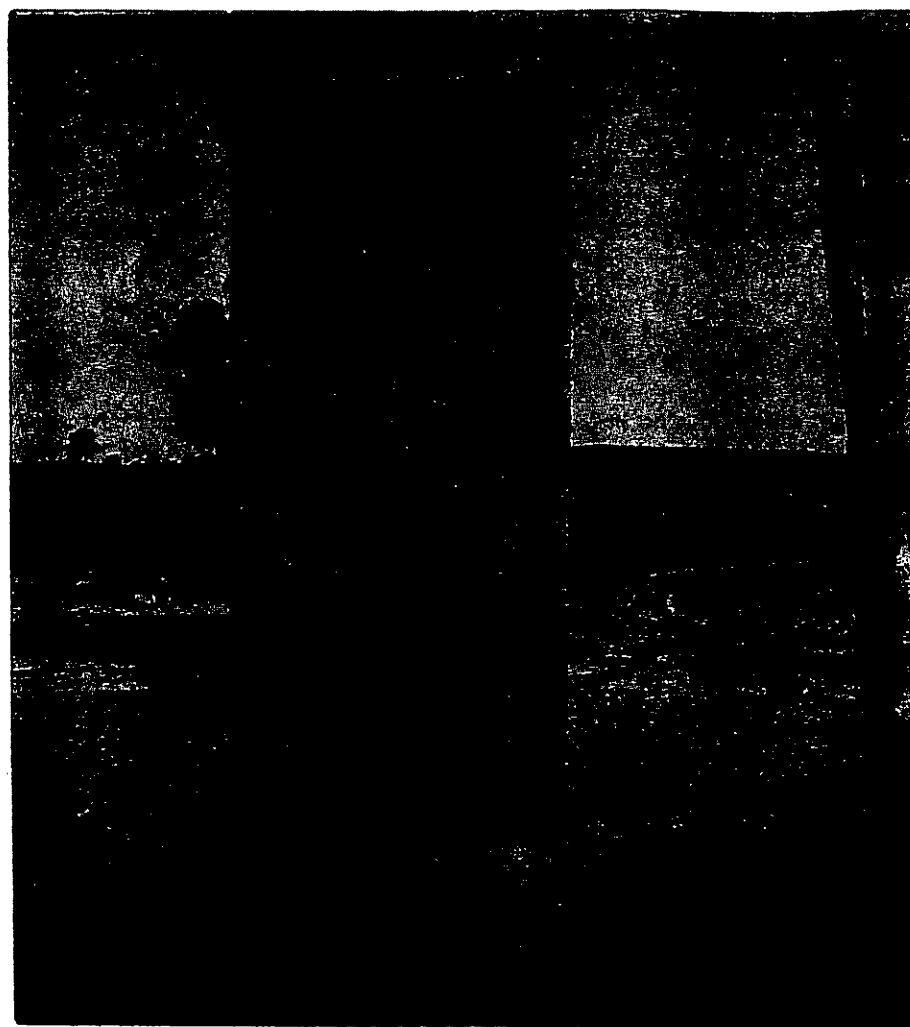
7 fan, after they had fought against us and killed a merchant
 8 caravan. And then we made war upon them, first of all
 9 we sent armies, the army of Mahaza, and
 10 the army of Dakuen, and the army of Hara, and then we
 11 ourselves followed, and we encamped at the place where
 12 the troops were assembled in 'Alaha, and we made our soldiers
 13 set out from there. And they killed, and made prisoners, and despoiled
 14 them. And we attacked Sa'ne, and Sawante,
 15 and Gema, and Zahtan, four
 16 peoples (or, tribes), and we took prisoner 'Alita with
 17 his two children. And a slaughter took place, of the men of 'Afan.
 18 503, and women 202, in all 705.
 19 Of his camp-followers there were taken prisoners, men
 20 40, and women and children 165, in all
 21 205. As spoil were carried off 31,900 and
 22 57 cattle, baggage animals 827. And [the king]
 23 returned in safety together with his people.
 24 And he set up a throne here in Shado, and
 25 committed himself to the protection of 'Astar, and Beher,
 26 and Meder (the Earth). If there be anyone who would overthrow him
 27 and remove him, that person, and his land, and his race,
 28 shall be overthrown and removed, and he shall be rooted out
 29 of his country. And he (*i.e.*, the king) offered as a thank-offering to
 30 Mahram, who had begotten him, 100 cattle and 50 prisoners.¹⁶

The title of the king is "Ezana... and king of Aksum, and of Himyar, and of Raydan, and of Saba, and of Salhen, and of Seyamo, and of Bega and of Kasu, king of kings, son of the unvanquished Ares". In all three languages, all of these countries and cities are mentioned with slight differences. In the Ge'ez text, however, the order of the last two names is changed. Between the two Semitic languages, on one hand, and the Greek on the other, we see one difference in the name of the country. The Greek text uses "Ethiopia", whereas the Sabaeen and Ge'ez use "Habasa", instead of Ethiopia. This name is found in the middle of Semitic words. The word 'Habasat' occurs here for the first time in an Ethiopian text.

We do not find the name Ezana in the lists of the kings. There, we find the name of the two brothers Abreha and Asbeha. His dominion extended to both sides of the Red Sea, but apart from three names, the places mentioned are in Arabia. This of course does not mean that the greater part of his dominion lay on the other side of the Red Sea. His dominion was here, united under Aksum. The countries mentioned in the African part of his dominion, are Siamo, Beja and Kasu, which are place-names found on the border of his dominion. Siamo was the country which has been identified as the region of Gambella in the far west, while Beja and Kasu are on the northern border.

Raydan was the capital city of Himyar where the kings had their palace. Himyar and Saba were kingdoms, while Salchen was the city of Sabaeen kings near Mârib.¹⁷

After listing his titles, Ezana mentions the purpose of the inscription. Because the people of Beja had caused trouble, he had sent his two brothers, Saizanas and Adephas,



The trilingual inscription of Ezana

Photo: Institute of Eth. Archaeol.

16. Translation by Sir E.A. Wallis Budge, *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia and Abyssinia*, (Oosterhout N. B. The Netherlands, 1966), pp. 248-249.

17. H. von Wissmann, "Himyar, Ancient History": *Muséon* 77 (1967), p. 448.

to fight them. His brothers returned to Aksum with six chiefs and their people, a total of 4,000 prisoners and 6,224 sheep and 3,112 cattle. The inscription gives more detail about the booty, the treatment of the prisoners, and their re-settlement at a place called Duala Bairen or, in Greek, Matlia. He settled them in another place for security reasons. As a result, the people, had no chance to revolt. It is not mentioned whether he settled other ethnic groups in their stead.

The second inscription of Ezana is in Ge'ez only and it begins: "Ezana, son of Ella-Amida, man of Halen".¹⁸ The first inscription gave Ezana's titles only, the second gives the name of his father and of the tribe to which he belonged. Then it mentions the tributary countries. All are mentioned here except Habasat. The purpose of the inscription is to show that the peoples of Aguazat who rebelled against him and refused to pay tribute were subdued after an expedition against them led by the king. The royal decree given here reads:

"Those who obey shall be saved and those who refuse shall perish". Fearing the consequences of his *dura lex*, they submitted one after the other and each of them began to appear, bearing gifts and offerings for the Emperor. Those who refused to submit were imprisoned or killed. According to Littmann, these people were most probably from the east and southeast parts of the Aksumite Empire.¹⁹ But if we assume the reading of *Adiabo* in line 25 to be correct we may venture to locate Aguazat west of Aksum.

Another inscription of Ezana deals with the conquest of the Serene of 'Afan, in the northern part of his kingdom. In this expedition he first sent three armies against them: the Muhazat army (ሠርዌ ሙሐዛት) the young army of commandos so to speak; the Dakuen army (ሠርዌ ዳኳን) the elephant fighters; and the Hara army (ሠርዌ ሐራ) the infantry. The reason for this was that they had attacked and killed a merchant caravan. Then he himself followed his armies and fought against the Se'né and Sewenté, defeating them and taking many prisoners of both sexes and bringing back much booty. On this occasion, Ezana erected a throne in honour of the gods Aster, Bahir and Midir at Sado, to the east of Aksum. Apart from the differences in the names of the gods honoured, the ceremony here described is strongly reminiscent of that in the anonymous inscription of Adulis.

The fourth inscription of Ezana mentions the religious change in Ethiopia. Therefore, let us first study religious conditions before Christianity.

3. Pre-Christian Religions

According to legend, the first Ethiopian king and god was a serpent, whose name was Arwé. His father was a python and his mother a certain woman. When his parents died, he became dangerous to the inhabitants. But fortunately through his sister, they made an agreement with him to offer him many young girls, goats, sheep and milk at regular intervals. And this agreement continued for forty years. Then Gebgebo or Angabo arose and killed Arwé, and he himself became king after he had married the sister of Arwé.²⁰

This legend shows that the serpent was worshipped here, in Ethiopia, as in all

¹⁸ DAE, vol. IV, p. 19.

¹⁹ DAE, vol. IV, p. 22.

²⁰ Tekle Sadik Mekuria, *Ka Ta'ote Amliko wede Kiristina, (From Paganism to Christianity)*, (Addis Ababa, 1941 E.C.), p. 33 ff.; E. Littmann, "La leggenda del dragone di Aksum in lingua tigrāi": *RSE*, 6 (1947), pp. 42-45.

Semitic countries, and the fact is evidenced by relief pictures of a serpent on one of the fallen stele of Aksum. The story of Arwé is similar in some ways to the legends of ancient Persia.

In Avesta, the holy book of the Persians, it is mentioned that there was a certain serpent, Adjis Dahaka, who was the king and god of Persia. The inhabitants gave him 100 mares, 1,000 cows and 1,000 buffaloes. A man whose name was Tretawona killed the monster and he himself became king. It seems that merchants in their travels may have carried this story from Persia to Ethiopia.²¹

In addition to this legend, from primary sources we find that the religion of Ethiopia in early times was connected with that of South Arabia. The gods of that country were worshipped in Ethiopia. Temples similar to those of South Arabia were built here. The main gods were Astar, god of heaven, Sin, god of the moon, and Almouqah, the principal god of South Arabia. Parallel to this there were indigenous gods like Mahrem, the god of war, and Bahir, and Midir.²² Cosmas Indicopleustes mentions that on the reverse side of the throne in Adulis there were the pictures of two prominent Greek gods: Hercules, god of power and Hermes, god of prosperity. "We found also sculptured on the back of the Chair figures of Hercules and Mercury; and my companion, Menas, of happy memory, alluding to these would have it that Hercules was the symbol of strength and Mercury of wealth."²³ At the end of the text, it said that the Emperor went down to Adulis to sacrifice to Zeus, Ares, and Poseidon. The archaeological expedition of Gallina-Paribeni failed to discover the monument of Adulis but succeeded in bringing to light monuments and objects related to the Greek religion. A fragment of marble was found bearing three Greek letters, which Paribeni construed to be *Hiphaistos*.²⁴ This mutilation may have taken place at the time of the introduction of Christianity when idolatry was eliminated.²⁵

According to the *Kibre Negest*, the official religion of Ethiopia in pre-Christian times was monotheistic. The Queen of Sheba brought Judaism to Ethiopia and this became the official religion.²⁶ The existence in Ethiopia of a Jewish religious community, the Falasha, with all its archaic ritual and religious practices, is a fact. The traditional belief in Ethiopia concerning the origin of the Falasha²⁷ is that, when the Israelites were returning from Egypt to the Promised Land, some of them wandered and came to Ethiopia, bearing with them five Books of Moses. This view is shared by Samuel Mercer, who writes:

"It is very likely, then that the Falasha Jews passed from Palestine, before the time of the Babylonian captivity, to Egypt, and thence to Abyssinia, where they settled and where they have preserved their faith, They know nothing of the Babylonian captivity nor of the Talmud, but they live according to the laws of Moses and they call themselves the «House of Israel»."²⁸

Wolf Leslau holds the view that the Falasha are Hamites who were converted to Judaism either by Israelites from Elephantine in Egypt or from South Arabia. He considers the latter view as most probable in the light of the close historical links between Ethio-

pia and South Arabia.²⁹ The question, however, still remains open. The existence of such a Jewish community suggests, nevertheless, that Judaism was practised by a group of people in Ethiopia before the introduction of Christianity.

4. The Introduction of Christianity

According to tradition, the beginnings of Christianity in Ethiopia date back to the time of the Apostles, i.e., there were then a few Ethiopian believers. In the *Acts of the Apostles* 8:26-40, the Eunuch of Queen Candace went to Jerusalem to worship and was baptized by Philip the Deacon. The Ethiopians returned home rejoicing. The father of Church history, Eusebius, makes this comment:

Tradition says that he (the eunuch) who was the first of the Gentiles to receive from Philip by revelation the mysteries of the Divine word and was the first fruits of the faithful throughout the world, was also the first to return to his native land and preached the Gospel of the knowledge of God of the universe and the sojourn of our Saviour which gives life to men, so that by him was actually fulfilled the prophecy which says, 'Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands to God'. (Ps. 68:31)³⁰

This is another proof that Ethiopians partly accepted Judaism. In *Acts* it is not mentioned that the Ethiopian was present on the day of Pentecost, but St. John Chrysostom in his Epiphany Homily says that "the Ethiopian also understood."³¹ This indicates that the Ethiopians were present on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. It seems that they were not mentioned by Luke only because they were few in number.

For most Greek writers the name Ethiopia was vague and general. So the question is: from which country exactly did this man come? Luke says that he was the treasurer of Queen Candace. Her name was popular and well-known to the Greek and Roman writers because of her attempt at self-defence in the war against the Romans in the first century A.D. Therefore, many writers supposed that she was the ruler of all Ethiopia. In *Acts* also the man was called the treasurer of Candace. Actually, we have no other evidence about his identity. In *Acts* it was mentioned that this man accepted the Jewish religion and that he read the Bible. From other sources we do not hear that the inhabitants of Meroë accepted Judaism, on the other hand, it is an established fact that a strong Jewish community existed in Elephantine. Whether these people cared to convert some of the indigenous population to Judaism is not known. At any rate, John of Ephesus, who devoted a substantial part of his church history to the introduction of Christianity in Nubia, does not have a word to say about this matter. On the contrary, in the Aksumite Empire, Judaism and paganism both preceded the official introduction of Christianity.

There is little doubt that Christianity made its entrance into the Aksumite Empire at least on a limited scale, before the fourth century. In this connection Origen writes: "The Gospel is not said to have been preached to all the Ethiopians, especially to such as live beyond the river."³² There were Christian communities scattered here and there in Ethiopia. These could be the fruit of the conversion of the Eunuch. Greek merchants later continued such work.

21. J. Halévy, "Traces d'influence indo-parsie en Abyssinie": *Revue Sémitique* 4, (1896), pp.258-265.

22. D. Nielsen, "Die Aethiopischen Götter": *ZDMG* 60 (1912), pp.589-600.

23. J.W. McCrindle, *The Christian Topography*, p. 56.

24. R. Paribeni, *Ricerche nel luogo dell'antica Adulis*, (Roma, 1908), Col. 491.

25. *Ibid.*, col. 501.

26. W. Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and her only Son Menyelik*, (London, 1922), p. 42.

27. See the unpublished Chronicle in the possession of Qese Gebez Tekle Haimanot, p. 80.

28. S.A.B. Mercer, "The Falashas": *Aethiops*, 3 (1930), pp. 50-51.

29. W. Leslau, *Coutumes et croyances des Falachas (Juifs d'Abyssinie)*, Université de Paris, Travaux et mémoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie, n. LXI (Paris, 1957), p. 1. ff. Sergew Hable-Selassie, "Die Aethiopische Kirche im 4. bis 6. Jahrhundert": *Abba Selama* 2 (1971), pp. 43-75.

30. *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. K. Lake, (Loeb Classical Library, London 1927) vol. I, pp. 109-110.

31. Migne PG. vol. LII, col. 812.

32. A. Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the first three Centuries*, (New York, 1905) vol. II, p. 123.

There is also another legend about the introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia. It is said that Matthew preached the Gospel in Ethiopia and became a martyr. According to Rufinus and Socrates, "when the Apostles drew lots to preach the Gospel to the pagans, Mathias drew Persia and Matthew Ethiopia".³³ But the Synaxar of Ethiopia ignores this fact, although on the 12th of *Tiqimt* it is mentioned that Matthew went to preach to the land where Apollo was being worshipped.³⁴ After he had converted these people he went "forth from the city to the cities which were outside", where he continued to convert the people there and for this reason he was condemned to death by the local governor, Justus, and beheaded. On the other hand, the Ethiopians believe that they accepted Christianity of their own will without shedding Apostolic blood.

It would seem that the conversion of the Ethiopians to Christianity was not the result of well-planned missionary work, but, according to Rufinus, it was accomplished as follows:

One Metrodorus, a philosopher, is said to have penetrated to further India in order to view places and see the world. Inspired by his example, one Meropius, a philosopher of Tyre, wished to visit India with a similar object, taking with him two small boys who were related to him and whom he was educating in humane studies. The younger of these was called Aedesius, the other Frumentius. When, having seen and taken note of what his soul fed upon, the philosopher had begun to return, the ship on which he travelled put in for water or some other necessary at a certain port. It is the custom of the barbarians of these parts that, if ever the neighbouring tribes report that their treaty with the Romans is broken, all Romans found among them should be massacred. The philosopher's ship was boarded; all with himself were put to the sword. The boys were found studying under a tree and preparing their lessons, and, preserved by the mercy of the barbarians, were taken to the king. He made one of them, Aedesius, his cupbearer. Frumentius, whom he had perceived to be sagacious and prudent, he made his treasurer and secretary. Thereafter they were held in great honour and affection by the king. The king died, leaving his wife with an infant son as heir of the bereaved kingdom. He gave the young men liberty to do what they pleased but the queen besought them with tears, since she had no more faithful subjects in the whole kingdom, to share with her the cares of governing the kingdom until her son should grow up, especially Frumentius, whose ability was equal to guiding the kingdom—for the other, though loyal and honest of heart, was simple. While they lived there and Frumentius held the reins of government in his hands, God stirred up his heart and he began to search out with care those of the Roman merchants who were Christians and to give them great influence and to urge them to establish in various places conventicles to which they might resort for prayer in the Roman manner. He himself, moreover, did the same and so encouraged the others, attracting them with his favour and his benefits, providing them with whatever was needed, supplying sites for buildings and other necessities, and in every way promoting the growth of the seed of Christianity in the country. When the prince for whom they exercised the regency had grown up, they completed and faithfully delivered over their trust, and, though the queen and her son sought greatly to detain them and begged them to remain, returned to the Roman Empire. Aedesius hastened to Tyre to revisit his parents and relatives. Frumentius went

to Alexandria, saying that it was not right to hide the work of God. He laid the whole affair before the bishop and urged him to look for some worthy man to send as bishop over the many Christians already congregated and the churches built on barbarian soil. Then Athanasius (for he had recently assumed the episcopate) having carefully weighed and considered Frumentius' words and deeds, declared in a council of the priests: 'What other man shall we find in whom the Spirit of God is as in thee, who can accomplish these things?' And he consecrated him and bade him return in the grace of God whence he had come. And when he had arrived in India as bishop, such grace is said to have been given to him by God that apostolic miracles were wrought by him and a countless number of barbarians were converted by him to the faith. From which time Christian peoples and churches have been created in the parts of India, and the priesthood has begun. These facts I know not from vulgar report but from the mouth of Aedesius himself, who had been Frumentius' companion and was later made a priest in Tyre.³⁵

The account in the Ethiopian Synaxar for 26 *Hamle* is largely the same, but is comparatively more precise and gives us more important historical details.

And on this day also died Abbâ SALAMA, the Revealer of the Light, the Bishop of Ethiopia; now his history is as follows: A certain man from the country of the Greeks, a master of learning whose name was MERPES (MEROPIUS?) came wishing to see the country of Ethiopia, and he had with him two youths of his family, and the name of one was "FERE MENATOS (FRUMENTIUS)", and that of the other was "ADESYOS (AEDESIUS)"; now there are some who call him "SIDRAKOS". And he arrived in a ship at the shore of the sea of Ethiopia, and he saw all the beautiful things which his heart desired, and as he was wishing to return to his country, enemies rose up against him and killed him, and all those who were with him. And these two youths were left [alive], and the men of the city made them captives, and taught them the work of war, and took them as a present to the king of 'AKSUM' whose name was "ALAMEDA". And the king made ADYOS (*sic*) director of his household, and FERE MENATOS keeper of the laws and archives of 'AKSUM'; and after a few days the king died, and left a little son with his mother, and the 'AZGAGA reigned with him. And 'ADESYOS and FEREMENATOS brought up the children, and taught them little by little the Faith of Christ, and they built for them a place of prayer, and they gathered together to it the children and they taught them psalms and hymns. And when they had brought the boy to the stage of early manhood, they asked him to dismiss them to their native country; and 'Adyôsês (*sic*) departed to the country of Tyre to see his kinsfolk, and FEREMENATOS departed to Alexandria, to the Archbishop ATHANASIUS, and he found that he had been restored to his office. And he related everything which had happened unto him because of their Faith in the country of Ethiopia, and how the people believed on Christ, but had neither bishops nor priests. And then Abbâ ATHANASIUS appointed FEREMENATOS Bishop of the country of Ethiopia, and sent him away with great honour. And he arrived in the country of Ethiopia during the reign of 'ABREHA

35. Translation, A. Jones and E. Monroe, *A History of Ethiopia*, (Oxford, 1955), pp. 26-27.

The same story with little variation is repeated by Greek Church historians: Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Migne PG, vol. LXVII, col. 125 ff.; Sozomenus, *Kirchengeschichte*: GCS, (Berlin, 1960), pp. 82-84; Migne PG, vol. LXVII, col. 996 ff.; Theodoret, *Kirchengeschichte*: GCS, (Berlin, 1954), pp. 73-74; Migne PG, vol. LXXXII, col. 969 ff.; Gelasius, GCS, (Berlin, 1918), pp. 148-150; cf., Sergew Hable-Selassie, "Die Aethiopische Kirche im 4. bis 6. Jahrhundert": *Abba Selama* 2 (1971), pp. 43-73.

33. Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Migne PL, vol. XXI, col. 479.

34. W. Budge, *The Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, vol. I, pp. 139-140.

and ASBEHA, and he preached the peace of Christ in all the regions thereof, and because of this he was called "Abba SALAMA". And after he had saluted the men of Ethiopia he died in peace.³⁶

If we compare the description of Rufinus with other historical sources or even if we read it carefully, there is a contradiction in the text. The author says that Frumentius and Aedesius lived in an unknown barbaric land where the inhabitants killed foreigners, especially Roman citizens because their commercial treaty with Rome had lapsed. Further he says that in that country lived Roman merchants who were Christians and Frumentius helped them to build a prayer-house. On the other hand, the behaviour of the people of this land in sparing the lives of the two boys and later sending them back to their own countries was a sign of a civilized people rather than of barbarians. He does not mention the name of the land. In the beginning, he says that Meropius planned to go to India and that disaster overtook him at a certain port. And in the end he says that Frumentius became bishop of "India".

According to his description, Frumentius and Aedesius lived for a long time at court helping the queen in governmental affairs. In other words, they grew up at Aksum and reached manhood. Because they were partly "co-regents", they must have had access to all the secrets of the government, but here he presents Aedesius as a man who lacks elementary historical and geographical knowledge. He did not even know who the king was or what the name of the city and the country in which they had spent so long a time was. As we have seen previously, the Aksumite kingdom had been known to the Hellenistic world long before this period. Adulis for them was a port "established by law" and the main commercial centre for Africa and the East. The kings knew Greek and they used it in their inscriptions and on their coins. It is therefore unlikely that Aedesius would not have mentioned the name of the country. For this reason, it is hard to believe that Aedesius did in fact ever deliver such information to Rufinus in person. We must suppose one of two things: either Rufinus never met Aedesius and the information was gathered from common people, or he met him, but wrote his account long afterwards when he had forgotten many details. The former alternative seems most likely, and we can assume that Rufinus wished to lend weight to his story by saying that he received it "not from a vulgar report, but from the mouth of Aedesius himself".

However, there is no doubt that Christianity was introduced into Ethiopia at that time. For this, we have literary and archaeological evidence. Athanasius himself who consecrated Frumentius as a bishop of Aksum attests to the introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia on another occasion.³⁷ We have the letter of Constantius which was sent to Ezana and Saizana, the two brothers. This letter corrects the geographical error of Rufinus.

Constantius was an Arian and he was trying to make Arianism the official doctrine of the Empire. Therefore, he ordered it to be preached in all his dominion, and those who resisted the imperial decree were imprisoned. One man who suffered much from this decree was Athanasius, the Archbishop of Alexandria. For his firmness he was called the "column of orthodoxy". Because he was the man who consecrated Frumentius, orthodoxy as formulated and defined at the Nicaean Council, was preached in Ethiopia. Athanasius was exiled and he was replaced by an Arian Archbishop, George of Cappadocia. In this way, Arianism secured more and more followers inside the Empire. But outside the Roman Empire, for instance in Ethiopia, orthodoxy was constantly gaining ground. This distur-

36. Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, vol. IV, pp. 1164-1165.

37. *Oratio de Incarnatione*, Migne PG, vol. XXV, col. 188.

bed Constantius, so he sent envoys to the different rulers to try to convince them to accept Arianism. To the East was sent a certain Arian priest, Theophilus the Indian (or Blemmyan), "who had long been living at the Court of Antioch with great repute for asceticism and working miracles".³⁸ His mission was especially directed towards Arabia and Ethiopia. In Arabia he established churches in three different places. "One of these churches he erected in a place called Tapharum (Zafar), the metropolis of the nation; another in the place where the mart of Roman commerce stood, lying towards the outer sea. This place is called Adane; and it is the spot where everybody inhabits on coming out of the Roman territories. The third church he built in another part of the district where the mart of Persian commerce stands, hard by the mouth of the Persian sea which lies along those parts."³⁹ As Ezana officially declares in his inscription, he was *de jure* Emperor of Himyar and Saba. In this case, one can say that Theophilus was allowed to preach in the peripheral area of the Aksumite Empire but of course this does not mean that he succeeded in his principal mission as a special envoy of the Emperor Constantius to the court of Aksum. Philostorgius, the Arian church historian, says that Theophilus, after accomplishing his mission to Arabia, "proceeded to the Aethiopians who are called Auxumitae, who dwell along the coast near the entrance of the Red Sea".⁴⁰ He also mentions the courtesy of the Emperor and at the same time he points out that Theophilus has not been in the capital city, Aksum.⁴¹ This, of course, implies that Philostorgius tacitly recognised the failure of Theophilus' mission to the Aksumite Court. Although the mission of Theophilus failed, thanks to Athanasius, the latter preserved Constantius' letter in his *Apologia ad Constantium*.⁴² The following is a translation of this letter:

Victor Constantius Maximus Augustus to Ezana and Shaizana. It is our greatest care and study as God knows—I think in fact in such things for all the human race—to lead them to a knowledge of God, transforming life by hope, and in nothing dissenting in respect of the search for the just and the true. I consider it right to assign to you the same treatment as to the Romans and the duty to use the identical doctrine in the Church. Therefore send Bishop Frumentius as quickly as possible to Egypt to the most honourable Bishop George and the other Bishops in Egypt who have the authority to ordain and to judge affairs of this nature. You in fact know and understand though you pretend to be ignorant, you alone, of what is well noted by all, that Frumentius was promoted to his rank by Athanasius who is guilty of a thousand crimes which cannot be justified by any of the pretences of the accused and has to-day been deposed from his office and is not found in any locality where it is possible to live. He goes as a vagabond from one region to another almost as a fugitive criminal. If Frumentius spontaneously obeys and renders account of the whole state of the case and in every way manifests that he has in no wise broken away from the law of the Church and of the faith it holds; and when he has been judged, having rendered an account of his whole life, and has furnished explanations to those who are competent to judge questions of this nature, it will be decided by them whether he is worthy to be considered a true bishop and to be ordained according to the law. If he prefers to procrastinate and

38. L. Duchesne, *Early History of the Christian Church from its Foundation to the End of the Fifth Century*, trans. C. Jenkins, (London, 1924), vol. III, p. 398; K.S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity, the first five Centuries*, (London, 1953), vol. I, p. 232.

39. Duchesne, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

40. Philostorgius, *Kirchengeschichte III*, 6, 12-35, GCS, (Leipzig, 1913); *The Ecclesiastical History of Philostorgius*, trans. E. Walford, (London, 1855), p. 446.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Athanasius, *Apologia ad Constantium*, Migne PG, vol. XXV, col. 636; *Ibid.*, tarns. Szymusiak, p. 125 ff.

to hide from justice, it will be evident that seduced by the villainous Athanasius, he feels impiously toward God and is infected like those already declared infected and is culpable. If Athanasius has the temerity to come to Aksum he will not only corrupt you with his abominable and impious discourses; he will also confound and disturb the Church, blaspheming against God, and even more he will be the author of the slaughter and ruin of the entire nation. But I am certain that the same Frumentius, informed of many things will achieve great utility for the public good by consorting with the most venerable George and with the others of the first rank who are gifted in such teaching, and that he will return to his seat highly instructed in all things ecclesiastical. God keep you most honourable brothers.⁴³

The letter written by Constantius to Ezana and Saizana first expressed wonder at their indifference to the new religious change and at their still retaining Frumentius as bishop. Then Constantius accused Athanasius of being a trouble-maker who was responsible for disturbance. And he recommended that Frumentius should be sent to Alexandria to be examined about his consecration. Further, he expressed his fear that during his stay, Frumentius might "corrupt" many people in Aksum. In the end he says: "God keep you beloved brothers". The letter was destined for the two brothers whose title is not mentioned. But from other reliable sources, we learn that one of the two brothers, Ezana, was the emperor of Ethiopia. The letter reveals the position of the Ethiopian emperor in the church of Ethiopia. He was the man who had the last word in church affairs. This is why Constantius addressed the letter to the political authority, while the case was purely ecclesiastical in nature.⁴⁴

Now the question which arises concerns the outcome of this letter. There is no concrete indication of a positive result. On the contrary, Athanasius' view suggests the failure of the mission of Theophilus. At the beginning, commenting upon the deed of Constantius, he says that the accusation against himself is not limited to the Empire alone, but extends further to the barbarian land also.⁴⁵ This means that the letter had produced no effective results at all. In addition to that, Ethiopian sources insist that Frumentius lived in Ethiopia until his death. In matters of dogma, the Ethiopian Church was, and still is, pro-Nicaean, condemning Arius as a heretic.⁴⁶

Aside from the literary sources, we also have archaeological sources which provide evidence of the official introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia. The last two inscriptions of Ezana and his coins confirm the event. The first of these inscriptions is peculiar from a religious point of view. In the other inscriptions he speaks of himself as being a son of unconquered Ares. But now he begins by saying, "by the power of the Lord of Heaven". This term is completely different from "Son of Ares", and it shows the religious change in Ethiopia. Again in this inscription, he speaks out categorically against pagan practices by saying that his army destroyed the "images in their temples". This fact affirms his dissociation from paganism. All this of course implies the acceptance of monotheism; and one piece of evidence that shows that Ezana adopted Christianity is the fact that, on his later coins, the sign of the cross replaced the crescent and disc.⁴⁷ It is, however, the

43. Sylvia Pankhurst, *Ethiopia: A Cultural History*, (London, 1955), pp. 58-59.

44. Sergew Hable-Selassie, "State and Church in the Aksumite Period": *PICES* (Addis Ababa, 1966), p. 1 ff.

45. "Agitant ces pensées et poursuivant ma route sans trainer, voici qu' une troisième nouvelle m'arrive: on a écrit aux rois d'Axoum de mettre dehors l'évêque de la ville, Frumentius, de me rechercher moi-même jusque chez les barbares". Translation Szymusiak, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

46. In this respect the statement of S. Runciman: "Arianism soon died out in the East except in Abyssinia": see *A History of Crusade*, (Cambridge, 1953), vol. I, p. 7, is rather misleading.

47. A. Kammerer, *Essai sur l'histoire*, pp. 158-159.

last known inscription of Ezana which provides conclusive evidence of the religious change. This Greek inscription was only uncovered in 1969 and it establishes, beyond any doubt, the fact that Ezana had adopted Christianity.

The following is a tentative translation of the text:

Christian Inscription of Ezana⁴⁸

1. In the faith of God and the power of the Fa-
2. ther, and the Son and the Holy Ghost who
3. have saved my kingdom. I believe in
4. Your Son Jesus Christ who has helped me
5. Who will help me always I
6. Aezanas king of Aksum and of the Homer-
7. itae and of Reidan and of the Sabaeans and
8. of Salchel and of Chaso (Kasu) and of Bougeit[ae]
9. and of Tiamo, Bisi⁴⁹ Alene, son of Elle
10. A [lami]d [a] [so]n of Christ. I thank the Lord
11. my God. And I am able to say being full of
12. gratitude to Him, for he cannot
13. and all my mind
14. affirms thanks to Him, for He with
15. me. For He has [d]efeated with ... strength and power
16. and given me great [victory] through His own Son
17. in Whom I have believed. [And He became] for me the guid-
18. e of my all kingdom. In the faith
19. of Christ and His will and
20. in the power of Christ, for He has guided
21. me. And I believe in Him and He be-
22. came to me a guide. I have come out to fight
23. the Noba. For they have against them.
24. the Mangiatho and Chasa (Kasu) and Tiaditae
25. and Bareotae saying that the Noba have overco-
26. me us and help us that [they]
27. press us by killing. And I left
28. by the power of God Christ in whom I have
29. believed and He has guided me and I departed
30. from Aksum with Aksumitas from Mega-
31. bio eight days I ascended having faith in God and
32. arrived in Mambaria and from there

From the sources it is possible to fix the date of Ezana's conversion approximately. Rufinus says that when Frumentius arrived in Alexandria, Athanasius "had recently assumed the episcopate". Athanasius became archbishop in 328, after the death of Alexander, which means that Christianity was preached in Ethiopia from about 330 onwards.

The introduction of Christianity in Ethiopia inaugurates a new era in the history of the country. The man who brought the new religion, Frumentius, was known as "Abba Selama", i.e., "Father of Peace" or "Kesate Berhan", i.e., "Revealer of the Light".

48. The inscription was also translated into French by F. Anfray, A. Caquot and P. Nautin, "Une nouvelle inscription grecque d'Ezana, roi d'Axoum": *Journal des Savants* (1970), pp. 260-273.

49. E. Littmann translated the word as tribe, *DAE*, vol. IV, p. 25.

There were two brothers both kings in whose time Christianity was preached: Ezana-Abreha, "he who has made light" and Saizanas-Asbeha, "he who has brought about the dawn". More than that, they are saints in the Ethiopian Church. The feast of Frumentius, is celebrated on 26 *Hamlé*, and there is a monastery church dedicated to him which is still flourishing at Abbi Addi on an inaccessible hill in Tigré. But apart from this one, to the best of my knowledge, there is no other church in Ethiopia dedicated to his name.⁵⁰ I think that this is also the case in regard to the two brothers, Abreha and Asbeha. Only one church in Tigré bears their names. It is a monolithic church with three altars; it is believed that the right-hand altar facing east contains the bodies of the two brothers preserved in good condition. Their feast is observed on the 4th of *Tiqimt* (15th October). In spite of their role in the introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Synaxar is very laconic about them. All in all, what it says is: "And on this day also is commemorated the death of the kings Abreha and Asbeha who reigned over Aksum in Ethiopia"⁵¹ and the salutation follows. Yared praises them in the same manner in his hymns. The *Book of Aksum* also mentions them. It extols the two brothers as the restorers of Aksum and founders of the first Metropolitan Church of Aksum Sion.⁵²

Frumentius is honoured as a saint in the Roman Catholic as well as in the Greek Orthodox Churches. The Roman Martyrology observes his memory on the 27th of October while the latter does so on the 30th November. It is therefore surprising that the Alexandrian Coptic calendar completely ignores the event. Nonetheless, the feast of Frumentius expanded to the "new world". D. Attawater and H. Thurston have some interesting things to say about this matter: "according to F. G. Holweck, the old diocese of Louisiana, U.S.A. (erected 1787) observed the feast of St. Frumentius; was this a gesture towards the slaves of African origin in America?"⁵³ On the contrary, although Ezana was called "the Constantine of Ethiopia?"⁵⁴ by some historians, he has not succeeded in securing a place in any records of hagiology except in Ethiopia.

In connection with the introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia, we have to take two things into account: the way Christianity was introduced into Ethiopia, and the relations between state and church in Ethiopia. In the first place, there was a fundamental difference between the way in which Christianity was introduced into Ethiopia and the way in which it was first introduced into the Graeco-Roman world. There, Christianity began among the lower classes and gradually, after three centuries, succeeded in gaining converts among some members of the royal family. In Ethiopia, it was the other way round; Christianity began among the upper classes and gradually spread down to the lower levels of society. In other words, Christianity in Ethiopia started as the official religion of the country and as such, it secured the help of government from the very beginning. Therefore, the Christian Church in Ethiopia did not experience the persecution which occurred in other countries. In fact, the support of the state implied the rapid expansion of Christianity in Ethiopia.⁵⁵

The problem which arises here is to determine what the role of the Emperor in connection with church affairs was. In the pre-Christian period of Ethiopian history, the king played a dominant role in the religious matters of his empire. At that time, as in

50. This statement excludes, in fact, the church of the Greek community in Addis Ababa dedicated to Frumentius (built in 1925).

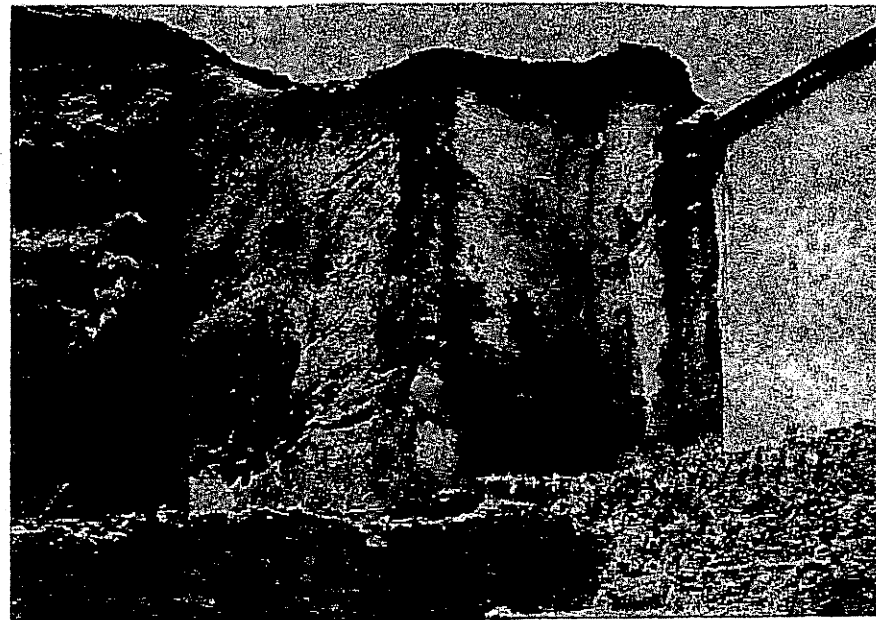
51. W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints*, vol. I, p. 112.

52. Conti Rossini, *Liber Axumae*, p. 1 (text), p. 3 (version).

53. Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, vol. IV, (London, 1956), p. 209.

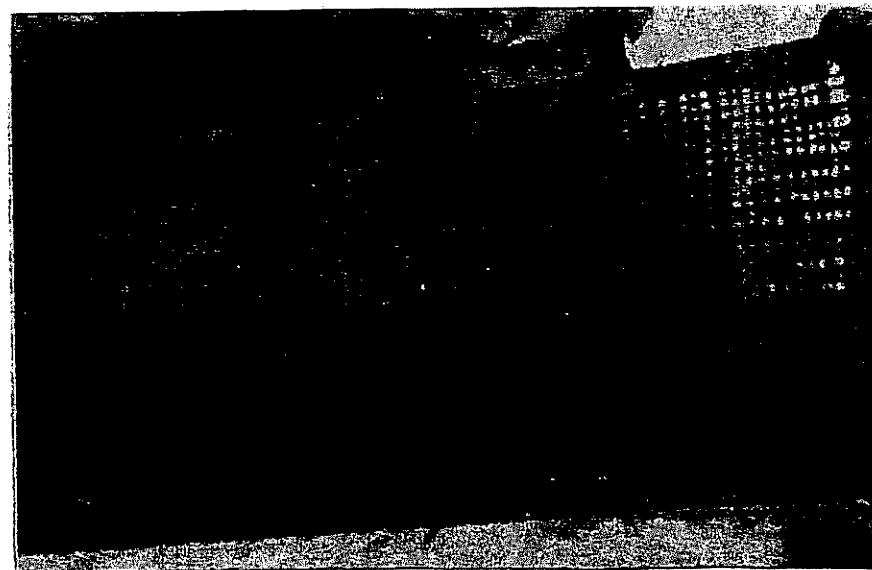
54. A. Kammerer, *Essai sur l'histoire*, p. 85.

55. Sergew Hable-Selassie, "Church and State in the Aksumite Period": p. 1 ff.



Rock-hewn church of Abreha and Asbeha

Photo: .



The alleged bed, on which had been brought the body of Abreha from Jimma. It is kept in the church of Abreha and Asbeha in Tigré.

Photo: .

other countries, the person of the king was considered sacred, and, being the son of a god he was the possessor of immense power. Furthermore, he was invincible to his enemies because of his divine origin. Ezana, who lived through a transition period after his conversion to Christianity, represented this concept in a new form, as the elect of God. In this capacity, the Emperor had a special role in church affairs. In addition the protection which the Emperor guaranteed to the Christian preachers was something more than a Christian duty. This development and the continuous importation of foreign bishops to Ethiopia gave the Emperor a free hand in church affairs and as a result, his position was consolidated in the church.

5. Events after the Introduction of Christianity

The political task of Ezana after his conversion to Christianity was his expedition against the people of Noba who lived beyond the River Takazzé.

Through the might of the Lord of Heaven, (who is) victorious in Heaven and on earth over all!

'Ezana, the son of ('Ella) - 'Amida, of the tribe Halen, the King of Axum and Him (yar)

And of Raidan and of Saba' and of Salhen and of Siyamo and of Bega and of Kasu, the King of Kings,

the son of ('Ella)-'Amida, who will not be defeated by the enemy.

Through the might of the Lord of Heaven, who has created me, of the Lord of all by whom the King is beloved;

Who will not be defeated by the enemy, no foe shall stand before me and behind me no foe shall follow!

Through the might of the Lord of All I took the field against the Noba, where the people of the Noba revolted,

When they boasted and "He will not cross over the

Takkaze", said the (people of) the Noba,

When they did violence to the peoples Mangurto and

Hasa and Barya, and the Blacks

Waged war on the Red Peoples and a second and a third time broke their oaths and without

Consideration (Rücksicht) slew their neighbours and plundered our envoys and our messengers

Whom I had sent to interrogate them, robbing them of their possessions and seizing their lances. When I sent again and they did not hear me, and reviled me

And made off, I took the field against them. And I armed myself(?) with the power of the Lord of the Land.

And fought on the Takkaze at the ford of Kemalke.

And thereupon they fled.

And stood not still, and I pursued the fugitives (?) twenty-three-23-days, slaying (some of) them and capturing others and taking booty from them, when

I came; while prisoners and

Booty were brought back by my people who marched out; while I burnt the towns,

Those of masonry and those of straw, and (my people) seized their corn and the bronze and the dried meat

And the images in their temples and destroyed the stocks of corn and cotton and (the enemy)

A cross from the church of Abreha and Asbeha

Photo: Sergew

Plunged into the river Seda, –and (there were) many who perished in the water, The number I know not–; and as their vessels foundered, a multitude of people, Men and women, were drowned. And I took prisoner two–chieftains, who had come to spy, riding on camels, –and their names were Yesaka, I, Butale, I, – also a man of noble birth 'Angabenawi; and the following chieftains fell:

Danokula, I; Dagale, I; 'Anakue, I; Haware, I;

Karkara, I; their priest, I; (the soldiers) had wounded him and taken from him a silver Crown (?) and a gold Ring (?); it was thus five chieftains who fell, And the priest, I. And I arrived at the Kasu, slaying (some of) them and taking (others) prisoner

At the junction of the rivers Seda and Takkaze.

And on the day after my arrival

(I) dispatched into the field the troop Mahaza and the Hara troop and the Damaw (a) and Falh(a) and Sera'

Up the Seda (against) the towns of masonry and of straw; their towns of masonry are called 'Alwa, I; Daro, I. And they slew and took prisoners and threw (them) Into the water, and they returned safe and sound, after they had terrified their enemies and had conquered through the power of the Lord of the Land.

And I sent the troop Halen and the troop Laken(?) and

The troop Sabarat and Falh(a) and Sera' down the

Seda (against) the towns of straw

Of Noba, 4, Negues, I; the towns of masonry of the

Kasu which the Noba had taken (were) Tabito(?), I,

Fertoti, I; and they arrived at the territory of the

Red Noba, and my people returned safe and sound after they had taken (some) prisoner and slain (others) and had seized their booty through the power of the Lord of Heaven.

And I erected a throne at the junction of the rivers

Seda and Takkaze, opposite the town of masonry which is on this peninsula. The Lord of Heaven has given me (as follows:) Male prisoners 214, female prisoners 415; total 629.

And men slain 602; women and children slain 156; total 700 (and) 58. And that is, prisoners and dead (together), 1387. And booty about 10500 cattle (and) 60, And about 51050 sheep. And I erected a throne here in Sado.

Through the power of the Lord of Heaven who has helped me and has given me dominion.

The Lord of Heaven strengthens my dominion! And as he now has conquered my enemy, (so)

May he conquer for me, where I (but) go! As he now has given me victory and has overthrown my enemies,

(So will I rule) in right and justice, doing no wrong to the peoples. And I placed

The throne, which I have set up, and the Earth which bears it, in the protection of the Lord of

Heaven who has made me King.

And if there is one who obliterates it and destroys it and tears it down, he and his line shall be up-rooted and torn (asunder); of them no trace shall remain (in the Land).

And I set up this throne through the Power of the Lord of Heaven.⁵⁶

56. DAE, vol. IV, pp. 32–35 (text). The above translation is by L.P. Kirwan, "The Decline and Fall of Meroë": *Kush* 8 (1960), pp. 163–165.

The inscription provides us with information about the external relations of the Aksumite Empire after the introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia. As his titles reveal the overseas territories of Saba and Himyar were under his rule. But all his expeditions were carried out on the African side of the Red Sea and we have no information about South Arabian territories in this period. Whether he was *de facto* ruler of Saba and Himya is still a matter for argument today.⁵⁷ The South Arabian sources so far known, do not mention the name of Ezana nor any role in the political rivalry among the kings, as was the case during the times of Gadar and Adbah. Nevertheless, it can be conjectured that he occupied territory on the eastern shores of the Red Sea. His territory on the African continent included Kasu and Beja, the inland and littoral part of the Meroitic kingdom Epiphanius (315–403), a contemporary writer says about this: "The Aksumite Kingdom embraced the coast land south of Egypt which was inhabited by Troglutai or Hole dwellers: and inland parallel with them, the country of Blemmues".⁵⁸ Obviously by Blemmyes, he does not understand Nubians; according to him these are two distinct territories.⁵⁹ F.L. Griffith has found in Meroë a partially vocalized Ge'ez graffito of two lines.⁶⁰

1. ወላደ/የሥላሴ son of Julius

2. ስለ/መረ/ወ... all the world and...

This and the previous Greek inscription suggest the submission of Meroë to Aksum.⁶¹ And the inscription of Ezana describes an expedition undertaken to suppress an uprising of the inhabitants. At the same time, it is the only authentic source which tells us about the last achievements of Meroë and its final fate.

From the point of view of linguistics, this inscription has tremendous importance. It shows the final development of Ge'ez, at least from its external appearance, because it is the first fully vocalized Ge'ez inscription. It should be understood that the vocalization of the Ethiopian language differs from that of the Greek language from which European vocalization originates. In Ethiopia, when we say vocalization, it does not mean that some letters of the Ethiopian alphabet were changed into vowels. We do not find this phenomenon in any Semitic language. What happened here is that sign were attached to the letters to represent a certain sound and these signs are basically three —/o with one more which identifies itself with the letter. But there are another three formed by a combination of these: l b o.⁶² So, in this way, we can say that there are seven sign equivalent to the seven Greek vowels. But no specific sound has been assigned to each of these signs; sounds are interchanged according to the letter to which a sign is attached. For example, when the second single sign is attached to ለ, it gives the sound 'O' (ላ); like wise the third sign produces the same sound when it is attached to ሀ (ሀ). This interchanging happens in all six derivations of the letter.

It is remarkable that Ge'ez is the first Semitic language to be vocalized. But

57. H. von Wissmann, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 70.

58. E.C. Winstedt, "Epiphanius (A.D. 315–403) or the Coptic Encyclopaedia": *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 32 (1910), p. 73.

59. Migne PG, vol. XLIII, col. 120.

60. DAE, vol. I, p. 50.

61. F. Hintze, "Studien", p. 30.

62. Some writers see an Indian influence in the vocalization of the Ethiopian language. A. Weber, "Ueber den semitischen Ursprung des indischen Alphabetes": *ZDMG* 10 (1856), p. 402 ff; S.K. Chatterji, a Indian philologist comments: "This great innovation undoubtedly came from the example of the Indian systems of writing, the Brami and the Kharosthi, and here the Indian merchants and resident at Adulis and Axum, in the third and fourth centuries A.D., might have been of help." *India and Ethiopia from the Seventh Century B.C.*, (Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1969), p. 49.

from where did the Ethiopians get the idea of vocalization? Since Sabaeen and Greek were both spoken in the Aksumite Empire, we might suppose that one or other of these languages had exerted an influence on Ge'ez. But Sabaeen was not a vocalized language and cannot therefore be considered in this connection. In the same way the question of Greek influence can be dismissed. Although we know that the cardinal numbers of Ge'ez are taken from the Greek alphabet, there is no possibility that Greek exercised an influence on Ge'ez in its vocalization because of the totally different nature of the language and script. The Ethiopian script, like the South Arabian, was originally purely consonantal. The Ethiopians modified these consonants to produce a syllabary in which each of the twenty six letters has seven forms. Some people, on the basis of the similarities between the Indian and Ethiopian alphabets, would like to see an Indian influence on the Ethiopian one. If we consider the growing commercial links between the two countries, such a connection is possible. One should, however, make a thorough and careful study before trying to express any concrete view.

The development of the Ge'ez language affected both its external appearance and its content. In this text, we note that the language had become rich in vocabulary and had acquired its own words for various objects and materials. This is very conspicuous in the fields of agriculture and architecture.

As for the relations of Aksum with the Roman Empire after its conversion to Christianity, we find scant information. Rufinus states: "Their [the Aksumites] treaty with the Romans is broken, all Romans found among them should be massacred".⁶³ Since he contradicts himself in the same text, there is no need to emphasize the inaccuracy of the information. In addition to that, Eusebius' statement about the import of Ethiopian animals to the Roman Empire indicates the continuity of commercial relations. On the other hand, Eusebius Pamphilus, in the life of Constantine says: "He [Constantine] even pushed his conquests to the Blemmyans and Ethiopians, on the very confines of the South".⁶⁴ Further he says that among the people who brought tribute to Constantine the Great, were Ethiopians.⁶⁵ Since this is also an exaggeration, it does not deserve any special attention. Anyway, Constantine the Great has been canonized by the Ethiopian Church; his commemoration is observed on *Megabit* 28 (5 April).⁶⁶ It is interesting to note that the day of the discovery of the True Cross by Helena, mother of Constantine, is the most celebrated feast in Ethiopia even to the present day.

The authentic source for the relations of Aksum with Rome is the letter of Constantius, the son of Constantine the Great. As we noted previously, the letter is addressed to two brothers, Ezana and Saizana.⁶⁷ This fact in a way authenticates the traditional story about the accession to the throne at the same time of the two brothers, Abreha and Asbeha. Constantius also issued a decree for those merchants who were travelling to Aksum and Himyar. "No person who has been instructed to go to the tribe (people) of the Axumites or the Homerites shall henceforth tarry at Alexandria beyond the space (the time limit) of one year, and after a year he shall not receive substance allowance."⁶⁸ Why he set a limit of one year for the round trip from Alexandria to Ethiopia and vice versa, he does not specify, but it suggests two things: that at that time the means of

63. See above p. 98.

64. *Die Griechische Schriftsteller der ersten 3 Hundert*, vol. II, (1908), p. 920.

65. Eusebius Pamphilus, *The Life of the Blessed Emperor, Constantine: The Greek Ecclesiastical Historians of the first Six Centuries of the Christian Era*, (London, 1845), vol. I, p. 7.

66. W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, vol. III, pp. 747-750.

67. E. Ullendorff, "Note on the Introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia": *Africa* 19 (1949), pp. 61-62.

68. *Codex Theodosianus*, XII, 12.2.

communication had improved, and there were no disturbances at sea by pirates and the facilities at the ports were good. We find evidence of this when we examine an unvocalized Ge'ez inscription found at Berenice, the main Egyptian port for Eastern commerce:⁶⁹

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. እነ አብረሃ | I Abreha |
| 2. ተክለ አክሱም | Man of Aksum |
| 3. ወገድርኩ በዝየ | spent the night here |
| 4. መጸእኩ እመኝ | [and] came believing |
| 5. በገደለ እግዚአ | in the power of the Lord |
| 6. ለማየ አርያም | of Heaven Ariam ⁷⁰ |
| 7. ምስለ ወልድየ | with my son |

An Aksumite, who was a Christian, came to Berenice with his son and spent a night there. The presence of his child indicates that his arrival was not for military reasons. On the other hand, from his act of engraving an inscription, we infer that he was a high-ranking man in the hierarchical order of Aksum. The purpose of his arrival at Berenice has not been specified, but as Littmann rightly pointed out, he must have been an envoy of the Aksumite Emperor who went there to negotiate terms of exchange of goods or to conclude a commercial treaty with the representative of the Eastern Roman Empire. The two parties appear to have reached an agreement. The inscription is unvocalized, but is a Christian one. Abreha uses the same term which was used by Ezana to the Christian God: በገደለ እግዚአ which is the archaic form of the later *Egziabher*. For this reason, one could date the inscription in the middle of the fourth century and the combination of it with the decree of Constantine is chronologically compatible and historically possible.

A few years later, the Emperor Julian, successor of Constantius mentions the existence of a commercial code which governs the external trade of the Empire. "And just like the wares of India or Persian silk, or all that is produced and collected in the country of Ethiopia but travels everywhere by the law of commerce, so too our native fig does not grow anywhere else in Earth, but is exported by us to all parts."⁷¹

It is probable that Ezana was not succeeded by a capable king who could continue his policy. According to the coins, Ezana was followed by Ouazebas, who minted coins with Greek legends and with a Christian symbol, the cross. According to the lists of Aksumite kings, Ella Asfeha (or simply Asfeha) was the next king after Abreha and Asbeha. Or, according to *Gedle Abreha and Asbeha*, after the death of Abreha his brother Asbeha succeeded and ruled the country alone. Except for the name, we do not have any detailed information about this king. With regard to religion, we find some information here and there in Christian Greek literature.

On the other hand, we do not know exactly what happened to Christianity in Ethiopia after the death of Frumentius. Whether the Aksumites continued to have

69. E. Littmann, "An Old Ethiopic Inscription from the Berenice Road": *JRAS* (1954), pp. 119-123; E. Ullendorff, "The Ethiopic Inscription from Egypt": *JRAS* (1955), pp. 150-161.

70. The Semitic peoples believe that there are seven heavens. According to the Ethiopians their name from the nearest to the farthest, are: 1) Arer, 2) Rama, 3) Eyor, 4) Heavenly Jerusalem, 5) Semay Wudud, 6) Menbere Mengist, 7) Sirha Ariam. Desta Tekle Weld, *Ge'ez Dictionary* (Addis Ababa, 1948 E.C.), p. 870.

71. *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, ed W.C. Wright, 3 vols. (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1922), vol. III, p. 175.

bishop from Alexandria, or whether Frumentius consecrated Ethiopian priests to the rank of bishop is not clearly stated either by Ethiopian or by Graeco-Roman sources. In the list of Ethiopian bishops, Frumentius was followed as Bishop of Aksum by a certain Minas, but about his origin nothing is mentioned. However, from a Ge'ez inscription found at Aksum it is possible to conclude that the bishops after Frumentius continued to come from Egypt. “አኑ ዳዊት ግብጽዋ በፀ (sic) ሐዋርያ እግዚአብሔር ሙሐረኒ”: “I David, the Egyptian has written this O Lord, have mercy upon me”.⁷² His name, his origin and his confession is clear. The only thing which is not mentioned is his profession. It is most probable from እግዚአብሔር ሙሐረኒ that he came on a Christian mission to Ethiopia. It does not seem that he was a bishop himself but one of those who accompanied the bishop. Here also another question arises: whether there was only one bishop or more. Palladius (368-430), a Greek Christian writer who lived in the 5th century, says that he came to Adulis on his way to India. When he decided to leave, he took with him the bishop of Adulis, Moses, and further he states that when he composed his book, Moses was already dead.⁷³

Paribeni has found in Adulis a clay lamp with mutilated Greek inscriptions, but clear enough to recognise some letters ABB ... ΦΕΠΙΣΚΟ..... These letters have been constructed by Paribeni as ABBA ΙΩΣΗΦ ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ... “Abba Joseph, the Bishop”.⁷⁴ On the other hand, Sozomenus suggests in his church history that when Theophilus of Alexandria, predecessor of Dioscorus, came to Constantinople to take part in the second Ecumenical Council of 431, he brought with him many Egyptian bishops and some from India.⁷⁵ By the name India, we can be sure that he understood Ethiopia for the simple reason that the real India fell outside the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Alexandria. There is a controversial point in regard to the participation of the Bishop of Adulis in the Council of Chalcedon in 451.⁷⁶ The Ethiopian written sources also imply that there was more than one bishop in Ethiopia before the sixth century. This means that the great cities of Ethiopia, like Adulis, had bishops.

The second question which arises pertains to the nationality of these bishops. If we judge from the later events, we are inclined to think that they were never Ethiopians. This point is better illustrated if we study the recently published Georgian text related to the Church history of Ethiopia.⁷⁷ According to this text, a certain Thomas, a deacon in the Church of Jerusalem, was sent by Martyrius (478-486), the Patriarch of Jerusalem, with a letter of recommendation to the Patriarch of Alexandria in which he urged him to consecrate Thomas first Presbyter and next Bishop of Ethiopia. In accordance with the request of Euthymius, the Patriarch of Alexandria consecrated Thomas as Bishop of Ethiopia and in his diocese were built many churches and there was an increased number of believers. “Et accepit ce cum epistulas patriarchae Martyrii ad Alexandrinum patriarcham; et ivit ut perficeret ministerium diaconatus sui. Et ut vidit patriarcha sanctum

72. DAE, vol. IV, p. 52.

73. J. Duncan and M. Derrett, “The History of Palladius on the Races of India and the Brahmins”: *Classica et Medievalia*, vol. XXI, (1960), p. 108; U. Monneret de Villard, “Mosé, vescovo di Adulis”: *Orientalia cristiana periodica* 13 (1947), pp. 613-623.

74. Paribeni, *Ricerche*, col. 499-500.

75. Sozomenus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VIII, 14; J.M. Neale, *A History of the Holy Eastern Church*, (London, 1843), vol. I, p. 220.

76. Ed. Schwartz thinks that the bishop of Adulis was included in the list of the participants of the Alexandrian church in the Council of Chalcedon: “Ein Bischof der römischen Reichskirche in Abessinien”: *Philologus* 91 (1936), pp. 356-357, while E. Honigmann opposes this view on philological grounds: “Un évêque d'Adulis au Concile de Chalcédoine”: *Byzantion* 20 (1950), pp. 295-301.

77. G. Garitte, “La version géorgienne de la vie de S. Cyriaque par Cyrille de Scythopolis”: *Muséon* 75, (1962), pp. 399-440.

hunc, non latuit eum thesaurus qui erat in eo, et consecravit eum episcopum super Abyssiniorum terram; et ut intravit Thomas in terram Kusim in Abyssinia, gratia quae erat apud eum splendidus erexit ecclesias multas pro Christo; totam Aethiopiā illuminavit per virtutes suas, et erat cum eo pellis vestiaria sancti Euthymii; sicut fecit Elias Elisaei splendidi inter prophetas, ita faciebat per pellem signa multa sanctus Thomas.”⁷⁸ Commenting on this event, Garitte writes: “Ce voyage a eu pour conséquence le départ de Thomas pour l’Éthiopie et a mis fin ainsi au stage de Cyriaque auprès de Thomas. La version géorgienne nous restitue ici un épisode authentique que nos manuscrits grecs ne connaissent pas et qui enrichit d’une donnée intéressante l’histoire, très pauvrement documentée, de l’Eglise éthiopienne en Ve siècle.”⁷⁹ The author quotes the letter of E. Cerulli in which it is confirmed that the name of the Bishop, Thomas, cannot be traced in Ethiopian literature. In *Gedle Azkir*, mention is made of a Bishop Thomas who played an outstanding role in the events of South Arabia at the beginning of the sixth century. It states that this bishop requested the Emperor Caleb to take action against the persecutors of the Christians in South Arabia. In the text the diocese of Thomas is not defined. It states merely that he had been bishop of a region close to South Arabia.⁸⁰

In regard to the life of the Ethiopian Church, this text raises two basic questions: juridical and doctrinal. According to the eighth canon of the first Ecumenical Council the Patriarch of Alexandria exercised jurisdiction over the churches of Libya and Neapolis. For these historical reasons and because Frumentius was consecrated by Athanasius the Ethiopian Church also came under the jurisdiction of the Alexandrian Patriarch. In order to give more legal justification, the precept was inserted in the 36th canon of the pseudo-Canon of Nicea, which says: “The Ethiopians have no power to create or choose a Patriarch, whose prelate must be rather under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Alexandria; or in case they should come at any time to have one among them in the place of the Patriarch and who should be styled Catholicus, he shall not, notwithstanding that he have a right to ordain Archbishops as other Patriarchs have, having neither the honour or authority of a Patriarch: And if it should so happen that a council should be assembled in Greece, and this prelate should be present at it, he shall have the seventh place therein next after the bishop of Seleucia: and in case he should have at any time power given him to ordain Archbishops in his province, it shall not be lawful for him to advance any of the natives to that dignity; who-soever does not yield obedience to this, is excommunicated by the synod”.⁸¹ The Arabic version of the pseudo-Canon of Nicea was translated into Ge'ez and incorporated in the *Synodos*⁸² and also inserted in the *Fetha Negest*, i.e. in the only ecclesiastical and civil code of the country which has remained in use, with

78. *Ibid.*, p. 406.

79. *Ibid.*

80. H. Winckler, “Zur Geschichte des Judentums in Jemen”: *Altorientalische Forschungen* 1 (1896), pp. 329-336; there is no mention of this bishop in the Ethiopic text which is published by C. Conti Rossini “Un documento sul cristianesimo nello Yemen ai tempi del Re Sarahbil Yakku”: *RRAL* ser. 5, v. IX (1920), pp. 705-750; see also Jacques Ryckmans, “Le christianisme en Arabie du sud pré-islamique”: *Atti del convegno internazionale sul tema, L'Oriente cristiano nella storia della civiltà, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, 361 (1964), pp. 422-432.

81. M. Geddes, *The Church History of Ethiopia*, (London, 1696), p. 20.

82. Conti Rossini, “Il Senodos etiopico”: *Accademia d'Italia, Att.*, ser. 7, vol. 3 (1941), pp. 41-48; Mauro da Leonessa, “La versione etiopica dei canoni apocrifi del concilio di Nicea, secondo i codici vaticani ed il fiorentino”: *RSE* 2 (1942), pp. 29-89; I. Guidi, “Der äthiopische Senodos ZDMG 55 (1901), pp. 495-502; E. Hammerschmidt, “Das pseudo-apostolische Schrifttum in äthiopischer Uebersetzung”: *JSS* 9 (1964), pp. 114-121.

out substantial change until modern times.⁸³ The interesting thing here is that the Church of Ethiopia *a priori* acquired a canon before its foundation. This canon was applied arbitrarily and the Ethiopian church tolerated it for sixteen hundred consecutive years!

Jurisdiction of the church presupposes doctrinal identity. It is reasonable to suppose that from the very beginning in matters of dogma the Ethiopian Church was on the side of the Alexandrian Patriarch who opposed the definition of the Chalcedonian Christological formula.⁸⁴ Ethiopians, from the very early times of their conversion to Christianity, had close contact with Egyptian monastic life. Around the year 391, Palladius, who visited Egyptian monasteries in the desert, met Moses, The Black, an Ethiopian monk who was the great saint of the desert. He died at the age of 75 leaving a considerable number of students.⁸⁵ On another occasion, Palladius praises the moral standard and the purity of life of the Ethiopians and underlines that they exceeded the indigenous monks in virtue.⁸⁶ Ethiopian monks were present in Jerusalem. Hieronymus, who was in Bethlehem in 386, in his letter to a certain lady, Marcella, describes how at that time there were many monks of different nationalities and among them were also Ethiopians: "From India, from Persia and from Ethiopia we welcome crowds of monks every hour".⁸⁷ The activities of the Ethiopian clergy extended to the north of Africa too. Synesius (370/5-413/14) in his 122nd letter speaks about direct contact of the Ethiopians with Cyrene.⁸⁸ On the occasion of the arrival of Deacon Faustus by the land route to Cyrene, he praises the Aksumite priests by saying: "Let be much success to the Aksumite priests". The nature of the visit of Faustus is not mentioned in the text; but since he was a churchman we assume that he went there for religious matters as a result of close contact with Alexandria.⁸⁹

Generally speaking, the fifth century of Ethiopian history is very badly documented. Except for some coins, we do not have any epigraphical sources. The period from the end of the reign of Ezana until the appearance of Caleb may be considered as the little Dark Ages of Ethiopia.⁹⁰ In many lists of Ethiopian kings we find only names of those emperors who ruled following Ezana, one after another, without mention of even a single event which occurred during their reign. These Ethiopian emperors who ruled after Abreha and Asbeha until Caleb, are seven: 1) Asfeta, 2) Arfid, 3) Amse, 4) Al'adba, 5) Ella Amida, 6) Tazena, 7) Caleb and the time span was 124 years. In some lists the reason for the decline is suggested at least indirectly. It was a period when so many

83. "As for the Ethiopians a patriarch shall not be appointed from among their learned men, nor can they appoint one by their own will. Their metropolitan is subject to the holder of the see of Alexandria, who is entitled to appoint over them a chief who hails from his region and is under his jurisdiction. And when the said metropolitan is appointed, with the title given to the chief, he is not permitted to consecrate other metropolitans as the other patriarchs do. He shall only be honored with the name of patriarch, without enjoying the power of a patriarch. And if it becomes necessary to hold a council in Roman territory and if the metropolitan of Ethiopia takes part, he shall be seated eighth, next to the titular of Seleucia...." *Abba Paulos Tzadua, The Felha Nagast, the Law of the Kings*, (Addis Ababa, 1968), p. 18. See also I. Guidi, "Il Felha Nagast" o "Legislazione del re", (Napoli, 1936), pp. 23-24; (text) D.L. O'Leary, *The Ethiopian Church*, (London, 1936), p. 29.

84. D.L. O'Leary, *The Ethiopian Church*, (London, 1936), p. 29.

85. O. Meinardus, *Ethiopian Monks in Egypt*, (Alexandria, 1962), p. 61.

86. E. Preuschen, *Palladius und Rufinus. Ein Beitrag zur Quellenkunde des aeltesten Mönchtums*, (Gießen, 1897), p. 43.

87. *Select Letters of St. Jerome*, ed. F.A. Wright (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1933), p.343; E. Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina*, (Roma, 1943), vol. I, p. 1.

88. Migne, PG, vol. LXVI, col. 1501.

89. This problem has been discussed in detail by scholars: Ch. Lacombrade, "Sur les traces des Axoumites", *Pallas, Annales publiées par la faculté des lettres de l'Université de Toulouse 3* (1955), pp. 5-14; A. Caquot et J. Leclant, "Éthiopie et Cyrénaïque? à propos d'un texte de Synésius", *AE 3*, (1959), pp. 173-177.

90. C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, p. 167.



Gold coin of Ousanas II (c. 5th cent. A.D.)

rebels triumphed and the emperors were unable to rule the country in peace and tranquillity.⁹¹ In spite of this fact, Palladius supplies us with information about the Aksumite Empire. Actually what he records is information from Thebaeus Scholastes who visited Aksum personally. According to this, there was a king, whom he terms βασιλίσκος μικρός without naming him. He gives the impression that Adulis at that time still was the main port of the Romans for Eastern trade and Ethiopians were the only intermediaries between East and West. For this reason, Palladius and his colleague Thebaeus embarked at Adulis in an Ethiopian ship to go to India. On the way they called at different ports to collect goods. Among the places which they visited, was Vessadas, which produced a large amount of pepper.⁹²

91. Tekle Giorgis, *The Chronicle of Ethiopia*, MS. Ethiopian Studies Collection, p. 10.

92. *The History of Palladius*, p. 110.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND EVANGELIZATION

1. The Nine Saints

Ethiopian sources describe colourfully an event which took place towards the end of the fifth century, namely the advent of the Nine Saints which is regarded as the "Second Evangelization" of the country.¹ The Nine Saints are well-known because of their contribution to religious life in Ethiopia.² Their names and the dates of their commemoration in Ethiopia are as follows:

1. Ze-Mikael or Aregawi — 14 <i>Tiqimt</i>	c.25 October
2. Penteléwon — 6 <i>Tiqimt</i>	c.17 October
3. Isaac or Gerima — 17 <i>Sené</i>	c.24 June
4. Afsé — 29 <i>Ginbot</i>	c. 6 June
5. Guba — 29 <i>Ginbot</i>	c. 6 June
6. Aléf — 11 <i>Megabit</i>	c.20 March
7. Yim'ata — 28 <i>Tiqimt</i>	c. 8 November
8. Liqanos — 28 <i>Hidar</i>	c. 8 December
9. Sehma — 16 <i>Tir</i>	c.25 January ³

The sources for information on these saints are: 1) The *Synaxar* which contains biographical data for Ze-Mikael or Aregawi and Penteléwon and Isaac or Gerima but for the others, merely gives the date of their commemoration; 2) *Gedle Penteléwon*⁴ which has details about the coming of the Nine Saints and especially about Penteléwon; 3)

1. In fact it was not the first advent of foreign monks to Ethiopia; individually and in groups other monks arrived, but about them we know little. One strong group was the so-called *Sadqan* (Righteous Men) the most prominent among them being *Abba Liqanos* who was the patron of the Ethiopian Emperor up to the end of the thirteenth century. The activities of this group were mainly concentrated in Southern Eritrea where they suffered suppression and persecution. (See C. Conti Rossini, *Storia*, pl. XLIV A. Mordini, "La chiesa di Baraknaha nello Scimezana": *AE* 4 (1961), pp. 132-133; R. Schneider "Une page du *Gadla Sadqan*": *AE* 5 (1963), pp. 167-169; see below, p. 126 n. 20.

2. The religious situation of Ethiopia according to some sources is described as follows: "ወሰብኑ ኢትዮጵያን ነበሩ በእሉ አምኑ በክርስቶስ ወቅት እሉ ያመልኩ በአርቄ ወቅት እሉ ይጠየሩ በአዕዋፍ ወቅት እሉ ይትግረሩ በእላት ወእምድገረ ወጽኡ እሉ ቅዱሳን አስተረጉሙ ሃይማኖት ወዋከየት ፖድር በሃይማኖት ወተቀደሱት በከደተ እገሪሆሙ" *A Chronicle of Ethiopia*, MS. in the possession of Qese Gebez Tekle Haimanot of Aksum p. 52. "Among the people of Ethiopia, some believed in Christ, some worshipped the *Arwe* (the python), some watched the birds for omens and some performed magic with fire. After their arrival these saints established the faith and enlightened the earth with their faith and purified it by the paths of their feet".

3. Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, vol. I, p. 155, pp. 116-118; vol. IV, pp. 1009-1010; vol. III, p. 944, p. 688; vol. I, p. 198, pp. 299-300; vol. II, p. 505.

4. Conti Rossini, *Vitae Sanctorum Antiquorum I, Acta Yared et Pantalewon*; *CSCO Scriptores Aethiopici* vol. 10, (Louvain, 1955).

*Gedle Aregawi*⁵ which can be considered as the main source for the lives of the Nine Saints; 4) *Gedle Afsé* a manuscript which was recently discovered in the monastery of Gunda-Gundi.⁶

According to *Gedle Aregawi*, their coming to Ethiopia is said to have taken place during the time of Ella-Amida II, son of Sa'ldoba. *Gedle Penteléwon* agrees on this point; it says that they came in the sixth year of Ella-Amida, son of Sa'ldoba, who was the sixth king after Abreha and Asbeha.

Concerning their country of origin, the sources agree that they came from Rome. In Ethiopian literature we understand three things by the name Rome: 1) the whole Roman Empire, 2) Constantinople, 3) Rome itself. Here the name refers to the first concept. The Roman Empire had political but not ethnic unity. These monks came from different places in the Roman Empire: Liqanos from Constantinople, Yim'ata from Cosait, Sehma from Antioch, Guba from Cilicia, Afsé from Asia Minor, Aléf from Caesarea and Aregawi, Isaac or Gerima and Penteléwon from Rome.⁷

If we examine their names, we find that two of them, Liqanos and Penteléwon, are Greek names. "Fóur have Aramaic or Syriac names; Isaac-Gerima, Guba, Yem'ata and Sehma."⁸ The other three also seem to be either Syriac or Aramaic. These monks were, no doubt, of different nationalities, but they were united in their religion. In *Gedle Penteléwon*, it is mentioned that these monks lived in peace and had the same religion as the King, the Bishop of Aksum, priests and assistant bishops.⁹ This means that they were anti-Chalcedonians. For this reason, they were not tolerated in the Roman Empire and were obliged to leave for Ethiopia.¹⁰ They came here with their material, priests, books, church articles and their people.

In Aksum they were warmly received by Emperor Ella Amida II, grandfather of Caleb, and the people of Aksum, and they stayed, according to some sources, one year and nine months¹¹ in Bete Qetin.¹² After that Ella Amida, the emperor who had accorded a warm reception to the Nine Saints, died and was buried in the imperial cemetery where today the church of Arb'aetu Ensessa stands, west of the Cathedral of Aksum Sion. His son Tazena succeeded his father. During the reign of this new emperor, it does not seem that they enjoyed the same privileges which they had during his father's reign. The reason for that may be their involvement in the affair of the succession. Except for two, Penteléwon and Liqanos, the others do not seem to have favoured the accession of Tazena to the throne. This

5. I. Guidi, "Il Gadla Aragawi": *RRAL, Atti*, serie 5, vol. 2, (1896).

6. Property of the Institute of Ethiopian Archaeology, not yet published. See also Conti Rossini, "La leggenda di Abba Afsé in Etiopia": *Mélanges Syriens offerts à M. René Dussaud* (Paris, 1939), p. 152 ff; Sergew Hable-Selassie, "New Historical Elements in the *Gedle Afsé*": *JSS* 9 (1964), pp. 200-203.

7. *Gedle Afsé*, Fol. 35.

8. Eugene, Cardinal Tisserant, *The Ethiopic Church; The Eastern Branches of the Catholic Church, Six Studies on the Oriental Rites, Compiled by the Liturgical Arts Society (USA)*, (New York, 1938), p. 37.

9. Conti Rossini, *Acta Yared et Pantalewon*, p. 401 (version). According to the source which was used by Conti Rossini, the Metropolitan of Aksum was a certain Elias; *Idem, Storia d'Etiopia*, p. 158 while *Gedle Afsé* gives his name as Menas (Fol. 33).

10. Of course, this is an assumption based on the historical circumstances in the Middle East at that time; otherwise, in the available sources on this subject, it has not been explicitly mentioned.

11. This is according to *Gedle Penteléwon*, see C. Conti Rossini, *op. cit.*, p. 44. But other *Gedles* have different views. In *Gedle Aregawi* the exact number of years they stayed in Aksum before their departure to preach Christianity in different places is not given. It says that they stayed approximately 12 years but when it comes to details there are only 9 years: 3 during the reign of Ella Amida II and another 6 in the reign of Tazena. I. Guidi, "Il Gadla Aragawi": p. 63.

12. Literally it means servant quarters. A. Dillmann, *Christomathia Aethiopica* (Leipzig, 1866), p. 209.



The Nine Saints from the painting in the church of Abba Yime'ata, Gere'alta (Tigré)

Photo: Ivy Pearce



is why, after his coronation and consolidation of his power, he preferred to remove them to different places to avoid further intervention. The view of the hagiographer however, is completely different. He connects the *diaspora* with evangelistic zeal.

According to him, they stayed in Aksum about twelve years altogether, and then decided to go out and preach the Gospel in different places. But the emperor and the people of Aksum insisted that Liqanos and Penteléwon should not leave them. They made a compromise that they would neither stay in the city itself nor go far away, so they settled a short distance outside Aksum. It is worth mentioning here that the two monks who remained near Aksum were both of Greek origin. Their mission mainly concentrated on those who were already baptized but who needed strengthening in the faith and further instruction. In addition, they were engaged in advising the Emperor in time of crisis.

Abba Penteléwon went a little farther to the northeast of Askum and built his cell on the ancient site of a religious centre. The hill where he founded his hermitage was called Asbo.¹³ Today it is known simply as Debre Penteléwon. The two inscriptions found there, one in Sabaeen and the other in Greek,¹⁴ prove the former existence of a pagan temple. It seems likely that the temple was demolished and the material used to build a church. In his *Gedle*, as well as in the *Synaxar*, it is said that, "*Abba* Penteléwon went up to the top of a little mountain, and he made himself a cell which was five cubits long and two cubits wide, and three cubits deep; its roof was a single stone and it had no door, but only a small opening. And he stood on his feet for a period of five and forty years, without sitting down and without lying down to sleep".¹⁵ The above quotation reveals the origin of asceticism which permeates religious life in Ethiopia. It is neither Egyptian nor Byzantine, but Syrian.¹⁶ *Abba* Penteléwon had exercised deep influence on political and social life of the country and earned high respect among the people. This is why Caleb, before his expedition to South Arabia, had come to him to ask for his advice and seek his blessing. Later, after his triumphal return from South Arabia as conqueror, Caleb led an ascetic life and eventually died there.

Abba Liqanos made his seat on the hill north of Aksum which is better known today under his name rather than *ጊዳ ጽጌሉ* Debre Qonasel. Whether this site was a place where pagan gods were worshipped has not been confirmed, but it is quite possible. A graffito of two lines in Ge'ez¹⁷ found there is of late Christian times. Because the *Gedle* of Liqanos has not come to our knowledge, we do not know much about his activities. Since his ascetic centre was located near the palace today known as the Tomb of Caleb and Gebre Meskal, we can assume that he and *Abba* Penteléwon had influence and prestige among the people and close contact with the imperial circle. He lived there for twenty-four years and died before Caleb undertook his expedition to South Arabia.

Abba Afsé went to a well-known centre of the Sabaeen religion, Yeha.¹⁸ The Sabaeen inscriptions which are found there testify to the worship of the principal Sabaeen gods: Astar, god of the planet Venus; Nauran,¹⁹ god of light; Sin,²⁰ god of the moon and Al-

13. Conti Rossini, *Acta Margorewos*, *CSCO Scriptores Aethiopici* 16 (1962), p. 21.

14. *DAE*, vol. IV, pp. 1-2.

15. Budge, *The Book of the Saints*, vol. I, p. 117.

16. A. Vööbus, "Die Spuren eines älteren äthiopischen Evangelientextes im Lichte der literarischen Monumente": *Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile*, 26 (Stockholm, 1951), pp. 13-14.

17. *DAE*, vol. IV, p. 53.

18. *Gedle Afsé*, photocopy of MS. National Library, Addis Ababa, p. 66; cf. p. 118.

19. *DAE*, vol. IV, p. 58.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

mouqah,²¹ the principal god of the Sabaeen pantheon.²² The temple in Yeha was dedicated to Almouqah. Fortunately for scholars, it was not demolished but was simply altered into a Christian church. The excavations in the crypt of this transformed church brought to light the oldest Christian objects in Ethiopia: crosses, bells, etc.²³ Afsé converted to Christianity the inhabitants of the region who, until that time, had been pagans. He continued to exercise his Christian missionary activities even during the time of the Emperor, Gebre Meskal, with whom he had close contact.

According to tradition, *Abba Isaac* or *Gerima* founded a monastery in a place called Medera, east of Adua. Among the Saints, he is the one credited with a predilection for the performance of miracles and wonders. Although he is said to have lived in Medera for twenty-three years, the site has not revealed any visible archaeological remains. Since the name corresponds with a South Arabian place name, however, it may be tentatively assumed that it was one of the centres of Sabaeen immigrants to Ethiopia. On the other hand, at *Adi Kewih*, which is located some distance from Adua to the east, there is the Church of *Abba Gerima*. Remains of the building are Aksumite-styled. Incense burners with crescent and disc and Sabaeen inscriptions have been found here. The missionary work of *Abba Gerima* seems therefore to have extended to this district.

Abba Guba founded his hermitage near that of *Abba Gerima*, west of Medera. Today there is no church at this site, only ruins remain. He was the only one of the Nine Saints whose mission apparently died out.

Abba Aregawi or *Ze-Mikael* was the founder of the celebrated monastery of *Debre Damo*. According to tradition, a serpent was worshipped by the people of the surrounding area. Aregawi substituted Christian worship for the adoration of the serpent, and a Christian church was erected on that spot, where the remains of a foundation indicate that a pagan shrine once stood. The monastery church which exists today, built at that time by the Emperor Gebre Meskal, is the oldest Christian church of the Empire. An unvocalized Ge'ez graffito of two words, አገ ጸለኸ "I prayed",²⁴ indicates that the place was inhabited by a Christian community in the early days of Ethiopian conversion to Christianity. Moreover, Aregawi was the founder of monastic life in Ethiopia: "He established among his children the Rules for Monastic Life, which he had learned in the house of his father Pachomius".²⁵ He was the most venerated man among the Nine Saints; this is why he is called Aregawi – the Elder. Consequently, it is believed that Aregawi did not die but ascended to Heaven like Elijah of the Old Testament.

Abba Aléf went far away, to the northeast of Aksum, and founded the monastery of *Debra Hallé Luya*. His *Gedle* does not add anything new, but repeats what has been said by others.²⁶

Abba Yime'ata or, as he is sometimes called, *Mata*, went to the region called *Ger'alta*, and founded a monastery which is still flourishing. The available sources do not supply us with further information, but it is certain that there is still a rock-hewn church there.

21. A. Caquot et A.J. Drewes, "Les monuments", *op. cit.*, p. 30 (text), p. 32 (translation); A.J. Drewes, "Les inscriptions de Melazo", *op. cit.*, p. 83 ff; R. Schneider, "Inscriptions d'Enda Cerqos", *op. cit.*, p. 61 ff.

22. C. Conti Rossini, *Storia*, p. 160.

23. J. Doresse, *Ethiopia*, (London, 1959), p. 68.

24. *DAE*, vol. IV, p. 61.

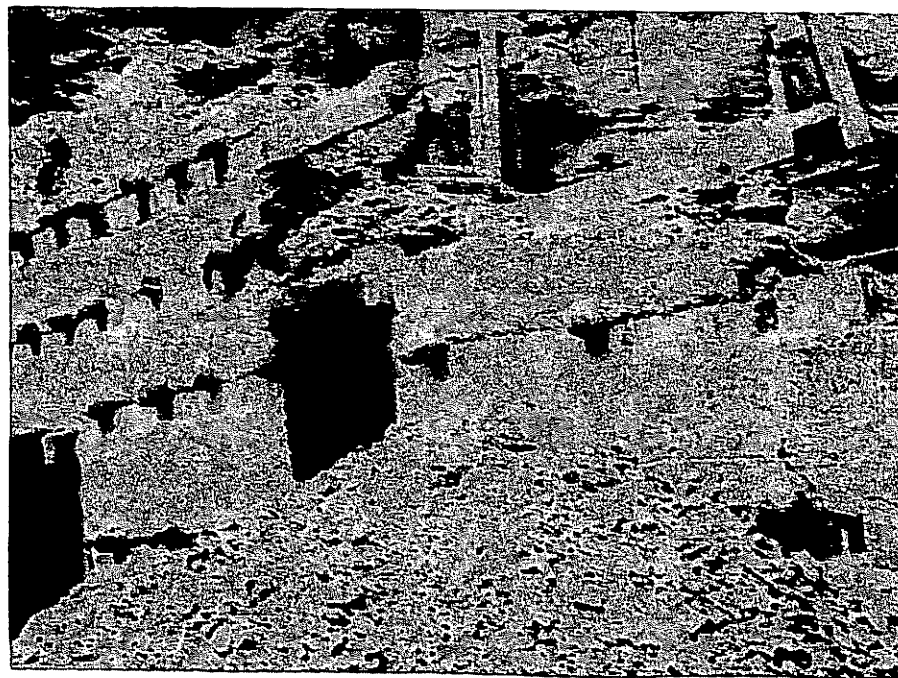
25. Budge, *The Book of the Saints*, vol. I, p. 155.

26. Personally I have not visited the site and therefore I lack fuller information about it.



Medieval Ethiopian church of Debre Damo on its tragic way of destruction.

Photo: Serge



Abba Sehma or 'Os, settled on a plateau, similar to that of Debre Damo, southeast of Adua. Today, there are no visible remains of antiquity, but the fact that *Abba* Sehma chose to settle there presupposes the existence of a pre-Christian cult. Today, the whole region is called *Enda Abba Sehma*, which in itself reveals the effective missionary activities carried out by this man.

It is interesting to note that all of the Nine Saints went in the same direction--east of Aksum; but, except in the case of Isaac and Guba, they settled relatively far away from each other. It is possible that they hoped to co-operate with each other in their difficult but fruitful task. From the available sources, we do not hear that they faced any serious obstacles. The transformation of a temple into a church, or the abolition of a long-established cult, might have naturally provoked indignation. The Acts of these Saints do not mention persecution or any kind of serious impediment in the fulfillment of their duty. This should not necessarily be attributed to the apathy of the local population, but rather to the strong support of the Emperor. Before their departure from Aksum to preach, the Nine Saints had secured the help of the Emperor. We hear that the Emperor visited *Abba Afse*²⁷ and *Abba Aregawi*;²⁸ this visit undoubtedly concerned their security and underlined his full support in this work. Thus, in this second stage of evangelization, the people followed the example of the Emperor and avoided bloodshed. Furthermore, the missionary activities of the Nine Saints show the limited extent of the first evangelization. In spite of the statement that "he (Frumentius) preached the peace of Christ in all regions thereof" (because of this he was called "*Abba Selama*"),²⁹ the first evangelization seems to have covered a very limited area and a small proportion of the population.

The mission of these saints was intended to accomplish two main objects: to consolidate the good moral life among the Christians and to convert and baptize the non-Christians of the country. The first object was achieved during their stay at Aksum and the second fulfilled when they left Aksum.

2. Additional Contribution

If we can trust the hagiographical information, partially at least, the activities of the Nine Saints cover a period of four emperors, Ella-Amida 8 years, Tazena 12 years, Caleb 30 years and part of the reign of Gebre Meskal. It is altogether 50 years, and during this long span of time, obviously, their activities were multifold. The contribution of the Nine Saints cannot be limited to the expansion of Christianity only; it extended also to literature and to ecclesiastical life in general. The translation of most parts of the Bible is attributed to them, although the beginning of the translation of the Bible goes as far back as the conversion of the country to Christendom. St. John Chrysostom says that the Gospel was translated into the language of the Syrians, Egyptians, Indians, Persians and Ethiopians.³⁰ If this phrase is not to be taken as oratorical hyperbole, it would be a good historical basis for dating the translation of the Bible into Ethiopic. In this case the geographical term Ethiopia cannot be disputed because at that time the region of Meroë had not been evangelized. The translation of the Bible into Ethiopic is believed by scholars to be the result of a long process.³¹ At Sairo, in nor-

27. According to *Gedle Afse* some of them like Afse, Aregawi and Gerima did not suffer death at all but like Elijah they ascended into heaven. *Gedle Afse*, op. cit., p. 65.

28. *Gedle Afse*, op. cit., p. 171.

29. "II Gadia Aregawi", op. cit., p. 72.

30. Budes, *The Book of the Saints*, vol. IV, p. 1165.

31. St. Chrysostomos *Homily II, Selected Library of Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. and trans P. Schaff, vol. XIV, p. 5.

thern Ethiopia, evidence of Bible translation into Ge'ez, at least in the early part of the fifth century, can be traced in a half-vocalized Ge'ez inscription published by A.J. Drewes.³² Preceding the text, there is a cross which confirms its Christian origin. The text is the archaic form of Psalm 140:1:

ለምብላሲ ዓማጊ አድገነኒ Deliver me, O Lord from the evil man:
ወባልሐኒ ለምብላሲ ገፋጊ የባ ተረፈ³³ preserve me from the violent man....

In this way one can assume that translation of the Bible commenced as early as the second half of the fourth century and was completed in the second half of the seventh century (678).³⁴ The period of greatest activity occurred after the advent of the Nine Saints who, before their departure to evangelize the countryside, translated the major part of the Bible. The use of Syriac words, like *haimanot*, *gehanem*, *ta'ot*, *miswat*, *qurban*, etc., indicates that the translators were familiar with the Syriac languages. Today, it is widely believed that the Ethiopic Bible was translated from the Graeco-Syrian version, especially that of Lucian.³⁵ Theoretically, the Ethiopian Church accepts as canonical 46 books of the Old Testament and 35 books of the New Testament, a total of 81 books. But in actual fact, she accepts only 73 out of these: 46 of the Old Testament and 27 of the New Testament. The Ethiopic Bible, as one of the oldest translations, can contribute to the reconstruction of the original text of the Bible.³⁶

Monasticism existed in Ethiopia in the primitive form of anchoritism, and later in the highly-organized form of Coenobitism. The former was initiated by St. Anthony of Egypt, who introduced it to Ethiopia through individual monks while the latter institution is attributed to the Nine Saints. These monks are said to have spent some years in the monastery of Abba Pachomius, where they studied and learnt to live the monastic life before coming to Ethiopia where they introduced it. Most probably they translated the Rule of Pachomius from Greek into Ge'ez, for it is the main governing rule of most monasteries in Ethiopia. Apart from that, they translated the life of St. Anthony, composed by St. Athanasius, which is the fundamental work for monasticism in the Oriental and Western Churches. Another book which was translated at that time was the life of St. Paul the Hermite, who lived before St. Anthony and who initiated anchoritism.

The Ethiopian Church, although juridically dependent on the Alexandrian Patriarchate, had a liturgy much more similar to the Syriac rite. The Church music, which was fur-

32. I. Guidi, *Storia della letteratura etiopica*, (Roma, 1932), p. 12 ff; E. Cerulli, *Storia della letteratura etiopica*, (Milano, 1956), pp. 23-25. On the contrary H.J. Polotsky says: "On *a priori* grounds it is unlikely that the Bible should have been translated very much later than the introduction of Christianity". ("Aramaic, Syriac, and Ge'ez": *JSS* 9 (1964), p. 2.) The different views so far expressed by various scholars on this theme have been summarized and also analyzed by E. Ullendorff in his recent work, *Ethiopia and the Bible* (London, 1967), p. 30 ff.

33. A.J. Drewes, *Inscriptions de l'Éthiopie antique*, p. 29; plate XXI.

34. The last two Ge'ez words I assume to be the name of the writer.

35. E. Cerulli, *Storia della letteratura*, p. 24; whereas I. Guidi believes that the last translation of the Bible into Ge'ez was in 676. The representative views on this matter are summarized by A. Vööbus, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16. He himself shares the opinion that the Nine Saints translated the four Gospels into Ge'ez. According to Ethiopian tradition, the Old Testament was translated into Ethiopic before the birth of Christ. The Ethiopians believe that at that time there was close contact between Ethiopia and Israel. Even during times of crisis, this contact was not interrupted. For example, when the Israelites were in exile in Babylon, the Ethiopians visited them there, and in the meantime, they translated some books into Ge'ez. The question here is whether Ge'ez at that time had reached the stage of being an independent language or not. We still lack proof of this. It will be remembered that when Philip met the Eunuch of the Queen Candace he was reading the Bible. Most probably it was the *Septuagint*, because at that time the Greek language was spoken quite widely in Ethiopia.

36. A. Heider, *Die Aethiopische Bibelübersetzung*, (Leipzig, 1902), p. 5 ff.

ther elaborated by Yared at a later period, is most probably of Syriac origin. The architecture of the old churches in Ethiopia is of Syriac style.³⁷ When the excavations of Adulis a Melazo came to light, the foundations of basilicae (which are rectangular with the apses) and a baptistry were found. This type of design was widely used in Syria.³⁸ Consequently, this architectural influence in Ethiopia can be attributed to the Nine Saints.

The doctrinal position of the Ethiopian Church was defined finally in the six century. For this purpose, the book known as *Qérlos* (Cyril) was translated from Greek into Ge'ez. In spite of the title, this book is not exclusively devoted to the dogmatic heresies of Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, but also contains those of other Church Fathers of the fourth and the first half of the fifth century. It is on this book that the doctrine of the Ethiopian Church is largely based.

37. R. Cornevin, *Histoire de l'Afrique*, (Paris, 1962), p. 240.

38. "...i tipi originari delle più antiche chiese aksumite vengono dalla Siria". C. Conti Rossini, "Pubblicazioni etiopistiche dal 1936 al 1945": *RSE* 4 (1945), p. 26.

39. H. de Contenson, "Les fouilles à Haoulti Melazo": *AE* 4 (1963), p. 40 ff; *Idem.*, "Aperçus sur les fouilles à Axoum et dans la région d'Axoum en 1958 et 1959": *AE* 4 (1963), p. 102; U. Mom de Villard, "Le origini dei più antichi tipi di chiese abissine": *Atti del 3° Congresso di studi colombo-florentini* 4 (1937), pp. 137-151.

CHAPTER V

ANOTHER BRILLIANT PERIOD OF AKSUM

1. The Life and the Reign of Caleb

The emperor who brought a revival of power and prosperity to Aksum was Tazēna, the father of Caleb. According to the list of the kings in *Gedle Abreha* and *Asseha* of Aksum Tazēna ruled for seven years (486-493).¹ There is the following historical note about him "Bzana whose throne name is Tazēna went to the direction of the East, and fought against India. He defeated them, killed them, captured many prisoners and took abundant booty. He subdued them and made them pay tribute". ኤሃና ወከመ መንግሥት ኃኒዳ መውት ሐካሪ ምሥራቅ ውተብዓ ምስላ ህገድ ሞያሙ ውተተሎሙ መግእረከ ሰብላሙ ወገዋሎሙ እስከ ረሰቡላ። ይጽገሉ ሎት ጸባኡት ።²

It is difficult to accept the text literally. The geographical term 'India' is flexible and broad. In this context, the identification of India with South Arabia is reasonable and geographically sound. After the reign of Ezana, we hear nothing further about the Ethiopian occupation in South Arabia. Due to the absence of a strong and powerful emperor of Aksum it seems that this overseas territory was lost for a short period. Then in the late fifth century, Tazéna undertook an expedition to impose his sovereignty in South Arabia and succeeded in doing so. This helps to locate the beginning of the late period of Aksumite occupation in Southern Arabia. Tazéna's policy was continued by his son Caleb, the emperor who consolidated Ethiopian rule over South Arabia.

After a dark period of one hundred and fifty years following the reign of Ezana, we reach an *apogée* in Ethiopian history at the beginning of the sixth century with the reign of Caleb. Information is available on the period from both external and internal sources. The former deal mainly with the external achievements of Caleb, i.e. his expedition to Southern Arabia. The latter include coins and epigraphical sources which have recently come to light.

Two inscriptions in Sabaean characters but Ge'ez text were discovered in 1968, one of these can definitely be attributed to Caleb. It is written on alabaster stone, 1.50 m. in length and 0.64 m. in width. It contains forty lines most of which are legible. It is written in Sabaean characters and is not in the boustrophedon style of writing, but runs from right to left only.

It begins with verse 8 of Psalm XXIV:

1. In the list recorded at the end of a Synaxar found at Debre Marqos in Gojjam, Tazéna's reign is placed between the reigns of certain others, but the dates are moved forward by four years to 490-497.

2. Chronicle (unpublished manuscript), property of *Öese Gebez Tekle Haimanot* of Aksum, p. 54. is also given as seven years, but the dates are moved forward by 100 years to 420-427.

እግዚአብሔር ኃያል ወጽኑል ፤ እግዚአብሔር ኃያል (Cross) በውስተ ፀብል The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.

Then he praises God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, for They had given him a powerful and stable empire and had protected him from his youth onwards and designated him to occupy the throne of his fathers. He then enumerates his tributaries:

By the help of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, I, Caleb Ella Asbeha, son of Tazēna ... king of Aksum and of Hasu (Kasu), and of Raydan, and of Saba, and of Salhen, and of Tiamo, and of the Yemenites, and of Tihamat, and of ... all, and of Rabam(?) and of Bega, and of Noba and of ... and of the Arabites".

Further, it says that his son, Gebre Krestos, had devastated a certain region and he himself had waged war against the Aguwazat people, who are already known from the inscription of Ezana.³ He took many prisoners and abundant booty and returned to his capital, Aksum, after he had built churches in the conquered region. In Aksum he built and consecrated the Cathedral and erected a throne for God who created heaven and earth.

The historical contribution of this inscription is considerable. It is the first inscription of its kind ever found in Ethiopia. The history of Caleb's reign has been based so far on literary and numismatical sources. In this connection, the name Ella Asbeha had been found frequently in Byzantine sources but not in Ethiopian ones. Now, from this inscription, it is clear that Ella Asbeha was another name of the Emperor Caleb.

From the list of tributary countries named, his empire appears to have been even larger than that of Ezana. The names of the countries, however, are not mentioned in strict geographical order, as was done in Ezana's inscriptions. Both the continental and overseas territories are listed haphazardly. It is hard to detect any genuine motive for this. From the overseas territories *Yemenites* and *Tihamat* are new names which had not previously appeared in an Ethiopian emperor's inscriptions while *Arabites* is found once in the inscription of the unknown Ethiopian emperor. The geographical term *Yemenites* is substituted for the earlier term *Himyarites* or, according to the Greek writers, *Homerites*. This is also the case in the dam inscription of Abreha at Marib. Though all the names are not clear to me yet, it is quite possible to say that all the overseas place names are identical with Abreha's inscription.⁴ This is logical, since the latter was the viceroy of Caleb.

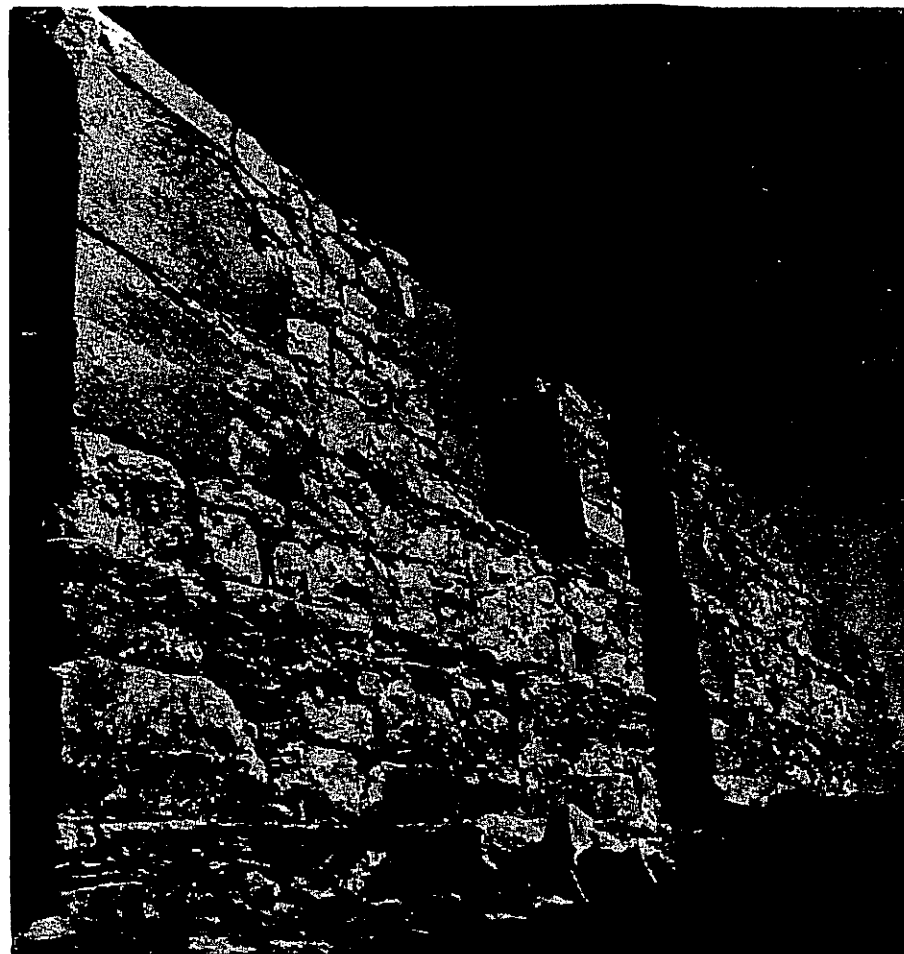
In continental Africa, Noba is mentioned for the first time as a tributary of the Aksumite empire. The region in fact was conquered in the fourth century A.D. and for the last time by Ezana, but he did not claim this territory as his tributary. The mention of Nubia in this century is significant both for the study of the power politics of Aksum and for the internal history of Nubia as well. After disappearing for two consecutive centuries from history, it now suddenly re-appears as a tributary of Aksum. This fact allows us to conjecture that it had remained so during the two previous centuries.

Unlike the Ge'ez inscription⁵ at Marib, attributed to Caleb, there is only one Biblical passage in this inscription. Even so, it is important evidence of the existence of a Ge'ez version of the Old Testament at least. It helps to establish the date of the trans-

3. *DAE*, vol. IV, pp. 19 and 24 (text).

4. S. Smith, "Events in Arabia in the 6th century A.D.": *BSOAS* 16 (1954), p. 437 ff.

5. See below, p. 136



Part of an old Aksumite building.

MATARA 1959.

Photo: Institute of Eth. Archaeol.

lation of the Bible into Ge'ez. In addition, there are many hagiographical sources dealing with the internal policy of the Emperor.⁶ During the reign of Caleb, Ethiopia reached new heights in many aspects of civilization: culture, economy, commerce and administration. Vasiliev described this period as "the last brilliant page in the history of Aksum".⁷

In Ethiopian sources, Caleb bears the additional names of Constantine or David. In Greek sources, he is called Ella Asbeha and this is transliterated in different ways. Cosmas Indicopleustes⁸ calls him Ellatzbaas, which is a corrupt form of the Ethiopian name Ella Asbeha.⁹ Procopius¹⁰ gives another variation, Hellestheaios, while John Malalas¹¹ transcribes it as Elesboas. The last author also attributes another name, Andas, to this Emperor, and observes: "In India the Aksumites and the Homerites were ruled by Andas (Iadas)."¹² Nonnosus¹³ calls him Elesbas. Theophanes, in addition to Adad and Elesbas, calls him Arethas.¹⁴ *Martyrium Arethae*¹⁵ follows the transliteration of Nonnosus and Theophanes. In Ethiopian archaeological and literary sources, however, he is usually called Caleb. All his coins bear the name Caleb.¹⁶ Among the foreign sources, only in the *Book of the Himyarites*, is the name Caleb specifically mentioned.¹⁷ He was the first Emperor known to have borne a Biblical name.¹⁸

Both the traditional and archaeological sources agree that his father was also an Emperor and was called Tazéna. These sources fail to provide us with information about his early life and educational background, however.

It seems that Caleb succeeded his father immediately after his death. Until some years ago, when *Gedle Sadqan* revealed new material, we had few details about his achievements in Ethiopia. *Gedle Sadqan* speaks about his expedition against the people of Belew Kelew,¹⁹ who lived around Amba Matara. According to the description, these people seemed to be independent of the central government of Aksum. They had their own

6. Among these hagiographical sources is an unpublished manuscript, *Gedle Sadqan*, recently discovered in northern Ethiopia.

7. A. Vasiliev, "Justin (518-527) and Abyssinia": *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 33 (1933), p. 67.

8. *The Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes*, ed. Winstedt, p. 72.

9. Until 1968, this name had not been confirmed either in Ethiopian archaeological or literary sources. In 1968, two Ge'ez inscriptions in Sabaeen characters came to light. In them Ella Asbeha appears as a surname of Caleb.

10. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, ed. H.B. Dewing, vol. I, (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1958), pp. 188-189.

11. Malalas, *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, ed. M. Spinka, (1940), p. 136 ff.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

13. *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Historiae Byzantinae*, vol. IV, p. 479; *Fragmenta historicorum graecorum*, ed. C. Mueller, vol IV, p. 179; *The Library of Photius*, trans. J.H. Freese, (London, 1920), p. 17 ff.

14. Migne, PG., vol. CVIII; col. 396; 489; 532;

15. *Acta Sanctorum*, vol. X, (1869), pp. 721-722.

16. A. Anzani, "Numismatica axumita": *Rivista italiana di numismatica e scienze affini*, serie 3; vol. XLII (1962), pp. 35-36; *Idem*, "Numismatica e storia," p. 28 ff; A. Mordini, "Appunti di numismatic axumita": *AE* 3 (1959), p. 179 ff.

17. A. Moberg, *The Book of the Himyarites* (Lund, 1924), p. CXXXVIII ff; I. Shahid, "The Book of the Himyarites, Authorship and Authenticity": *Muséon* 76 (1963), p. 360.

18. The Biblical Caleb was the son of Jephunneh of the tribe of Judah, a determined man who played a outstanding role in early Jewish history. He was among the people who were carefully chosen by Moses and sent to spy out the land of Canaan. Caleb and Joshua are the only men who obeyed the word of the Lord and therefore, they were rewarded for their courage and accomplishment. Num. XIII (1 and 14-24).

19. About the etymology and the geographical location of Belew, see O.G.S. Crawford, *The Funj Kingdom of Sennar* (Gloucester, 1951), p. 109 ff.; C. Conti Rossini, "Piccoli studi etiopici": *ZA* 27 (1912), pp. 365-367.

soldiers and institutions and they had not yet accepted the Christian faith. Whether or not their head was a king, *Gedle Sadqan* does not specify. However, they lived in great houses built in adjoining compounds and they always danced and sang. The *Sadqan* who lived on Amba Matara were disturbed by the behaviour of these people. It seems that they tried to convert them and make them change their way of living. Eventually, they killed one of the *Sadqan*, which shocked the missionaries deeply. *Gedle Sadqan* further describes the attitude of the *Sadqan* towards the people of Belew Kelew, in a religious context. It says that they prayed to God to take revenge on these people; and God sent Caleb for this purpose. Caleb came from Aksum through an underground passage to Matara. He invaded the city and destroyed it.²⁰

In November 1959, an excavation was begun about 2 kilometres southwest of Amba Matara by the experts of the Ethiopian Institute of Archaeology of Addis Ababa. Here they discovered the foundations of a complex of buildings of Aksumite style. The experts are sure that there was a town there during the Aksumite period.²¹ Some of the pottery found there bears Christian symbols, e.g., a cross or the two Greek capital letters, α & ω (alpha and omega). This indicates that after the expedition of Caleb, the town was inhabited by Christians.

2. The Persecution of the Christians in Southern Arabia

Caleb is known in world history for his expedition to Arabia. During his time the Aksumite territory of South Arabia, under his authority, was greater than ever. It consisted not only of the kingdoms of Himyar and Saba, (as was the case in the time of Ezana) but extended further to the north as far as Nagran. In the sixth century, there were Ethiopian garrisons in key positions like Zafar and Nagran. They had fortified the cities strongly so that they might not be occupied by the enemy. In order to consolidate their occupation, the Ethiopians were also trying to convert the people to the Christian faith, whereas in ancient times, culture and cult were identified with each other. This religious policy of the Aksumites had grievous consequences for the presence of the Ethiopians in that region. In connection with this, H. St. J. B. Philby remarks: "An identical and more serious effect of the Abyssinian occupation was, however, the introduction of Christianity into Southern Arabia as the established State religion".²²

Both the political and religious policies of the Aksumites were in conflict with the sentiments of the indigenous inhabitants of Arabia. As it is obvious, they opposed Ethiopian sovereignty; therefore, they did their best to gain their independence by any possible

20. R. Schneider, "Une page du Gadla Sadqan," *AE*, 5 (1963), pp. 167-168 (text); F. Anfray, "La première campagne de fouilles à Matara près de Sénafé," *AE* 5 (1963), p. 90. The *Sadqan* were a separate group from the Nine Saints. They apparently reached Ethiopia during the reign of the Emperor Ella-Amida II (478-486 A.D.), a few years after the arrival of the Nine Saints. They were many in number and relics of them are found in Matara as well as at Berahto Giorgis in Gulo Makeda. From their Acts (*Gedle*) it appears that they devoted all their efforts to missionary activities in an area quite distant from where the Nine Saints were. They were active in this region for more than thirty years. Eventually their work brought them into conflict with the local people and this resulted in their martyrdom. In fact, they were the first martyrs in the history of the Ethiopian Church. The commemoration of Matara Sadqan is observed on 19 *Tiqnit*. "ወበዛቲ ዕለት ካዕበ ተክክሮሙ ለጸድቃን እለ መጥራ (Sic) እለ ተቀትሉ በግፍዕ በእደ እኩያን ሰበእ ወእስከ ይእኪ ግዕዝ ሥጋሆሙ ኢተሌልየ ወመግነዞሙ ኢበልየ": From a *Synaxar* written on paper which includes principally the Ethiopian Saints or those foreigners who were distinguished in religious life in Ethiopia. (Trinity Cathedral Library, Addis Ababa), p. 268.

21. F. Anfray, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-166.

22. *The Background of Islam*, (Alexandria, 1947), p. 114.

means. One of these ways was through religious alignment.

The inhabitants of this country were originally polytheistic, i.e., they worshipped many different gods. Later with the coming of a number of Jews to South Arabia especially after the Roman invasion of Palestine led by Titus in 70 A.D., they began to accept Judaism. However, their conversion had political motives; they thought in this way to get help from the Jews whose number was increasing day by day.

At the same time, Christianity had been introduced in Arabia. St. Paul himself spent more than three years there.²³ According to tradition, other Apostles and Church Fathers also preached the Gospel there. From historical sources we know that in the fourth century a certain Theophilus, who was Arian in confession, established churches in South Arabia.²⁴

The source materials for the events which took place in the early part of the sixth century consist of both archaeological findings and literary works. The archaeological sources are the recently discovered Sabaeen²⁵ and Ge'ez inscriptions in South Arabia. These inscriptions reveal that this persecution was mainly directed against the Ethiopians who inhabited various places in South Arabia in the first quarter of the sixth century and that a retaliatory expedition was undertaken by the Ethiopian Emperor. These general and fragmented pieces of information from first-hand sources are detailed and, to a certain extent, elaborated upon in literary works. The latter can be classified in two categories: ecclesiastical and secular. The persecution caused reverberations in all Christian countries and gave rise to works in prose and verse in different languages Greek, Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic, Latin and Armenian.²⁶ These works were compiled to stress the oppression suffered by Christians in Nagran and other places. In other words these works were compiled, not to give the facts as such but to draw the attention of the Christian world to the sufferings of their co-religionists in Arabia and excite a desire for retaliation. Since the events in Arabia directly affected the Christian world as a whole the secular historians have also paid attention to these happenings.²⁷ If we compare the eccle-

23. Galatians 1: 17.

24. See above, p. 101.

25. G. Ryckmans, "Inscriptions sud-arabes, 10^e série": *Muséon* 66 (1953), pp. 267-317; W. Caskel, *Entdeckungen in Arabien* (Arbeitsgemeinschaft fuer Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen Geisteswissenschaften, Heft 30), (Köln, 1954); G. Ryckmans, "Une inscription chrétienne sabéenne": *Muséon* 5 (1946), pp. 165-172; H. St. J. B. Philby, "Note on the last Kings of Saba": *Muséon* 63 (1950), pp. 265-275; A. Jamme, *Sabaeen and Hasaeen Inscriptions from Saudi Arabia* (Rome, 1966), p. 24; M. Kami "An Ethiopic Inscription found at Mareb": *JSS* 9 (1964), pp. 56-57; A. Caquot, "L'inscription éthiopienne de Marib": *AE* 6 (1965), pp. 223-226.

26. The main Christian works in the Greek language are compiled and published in *Acta Sanctorum* vol. X, (Paris and Rome, October, 1869), pp. 721-759. In Syriac we have *The Book of the Himyarite*, ed. A. Möberg (Lund, 1924); *The Letter of Simeon of Beth Arsham*, ed. I. Guidi, *RRAL, Atti*, serie: vol. 7 (1881), pp. 501-515; *The Hymn of John Psalter*, which was originally composed in Greek, preserved in Syriac and published by R. Schroeter in *ZDMG* 31 (1877), pp. 400-405; see C. Conti Rossini *Storia d'Etiochia*, p. 172; another work related to the topic, composed in Syriac, is the work of John of Ephesus or of Asia (1886) which is mostly published in *Patrologia Orientalis*, vol. 17, pp. 1-30. The letter of Simeon of Beth Arsham has been published in an English translation by A. Jeffery in *Muslim World*, 37 (1946), p. 104-116. In Ethiopic, the "Martyrology of Harith", text and translation into Portuguese, was published by F.M.E. Pereira in *Historia dos Martyres de Nagran* (Lisbon, 1899) pp. 79-122 (text) and pp. 123-156 (trans.). In 1963, I saw two manuscripts in Shewa province, in the Tigor Mariam Church in the Bulga region and at Lake Zuway, containing passages related to Caleb expedition to South Arabia. To the best of my knowledge both manuscripts are of the early 15th century. The one found at Tigor Mariam is contained in *Gedle Sema'tai*, the other, found at Lake Zuway an independent booklet.

27. Procopius, *op. cit.*, p. 189 ff (version); Cosmas, *op. cit.*, p. 55; Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 185-186.

siastical literature with the secular we find the latter more factual. This is because the secular historians in general were more laconic in their description of these events.

The Persecution ²⁸

The rivalry between the two religions, Christianity and Judaism, became acute when the local prince, Dhu Nuwas, was converted to Judaism and took the name of Jus-suf (Joseph). With the help of his co-religionists and his people, he began to be more and more aggressive towards the Aksumites and the Christian religion. Christianity had passed through the era of persecution long before and now had secured two great supporters, the Byzantine Emperor in the Mediterranean world, and the Aksumite Emperor, in the Red Sea area; Christian rulers were therefore in a position to attack the enemies of their faith instead of meekly submitting to persecution. Therefore, when persecution began in Arabia, great anguish and distress were felt throughout the Christian world. This is attested to by the abundant literature produced at that time.

The first persecution of Joseph or Masruk, according to Syrian sources, or Finhas in Ethiopian sources, took place in the town of Zafar. It is located in the middle of South Arabia and was a strongly fortified city with thick walls. In the city were many Ethiopian soldiers, there to maintain peace and order in the area. Most of the inhabitants accepted the Christian religion and the city had many churches. Dhu Nuwas planned first to attack this town, because of its relative proximity to Aksum, and to disrupt communication with the Aksumite emperor. Moreover, the majority of the Ethiopian army were garrisoned there, and if he defeated them, there would not be strong resistance by any other town. But soon he realized that he could not conquer the Ethiopians and capture the town, except by trickery, so he sent Christian priests as well as rabbis to the town with a letter in which he swore in the name of Adonay that he would not harm them if they came voluntarily to him. On the contrary, he would send them to their king in safety. The Ethiopians did not trust the letter, but the priests who brought it confirmed it and swore in the name of God that everything in it was true. Believing in their words, 300 Ethiopians with their leader, B' BW, came out from the town and arrived in the camp of Dhu Nuwas. The South Arabian prince had planned to massacre all the Ethiopians and instructed the army that during the night one South Arabian soldier had to sleep beside each Ethiopian and behead him. When the Ethiopians arrived, Dhu Nuwas received them hospitably and gave a reception in their honour just to deceive them. After nightfall, they slept and at that moment, the South Arabian soldiers began to massacre the Ethiopians. The following day everyone presented the head of an Ethiopian to the prince and in his presence the heads were counted and found to number exactly 300. Thus he was sure that none of the Ethiopians had escaped death.

Dhu Nuwas then marched to Zafar. In the town a group of old people, women and children (280 of them) were assembled in the church praying. Dhu Nuwas ordered the church to be closed and set on fire and the Christians who were inside burned alive. As for those who were not in the church, he ordered them to renounce the Christian faith and embrace Judaism on pain of death. Many of them preferred to suffer martyrdom

²⁸ J. Ryckmans, *L'institution monarchique en Arabie méridionale avant l'Islam*, (Louvain 1951), p. 320 ff.; *Idem*, *La persécution des chrétiens hymiarites au sixième siècle*, (Istanbul and Leiden, 1956); W. Caskel, *Entdeckungen in Arabien*, (Köln and Opladen, 1954); S. Smith, "Events in Arabia in the 6th Century A.D.": *BSAOS* 16 (1954), pp. 425-468; H. v. Wissmann and M. Höffner, *Beiträge zur historischen Geographie des vorislamischen Suedarabien*, (Tübingen, 1952). For the earlier works see A. Kammerer, *Essai sur l'histoire d'Abyssinie*, (Paris, 1926), p. 110, n.1; B. Rubin, *Prokopios von Kaisaraea*, (Stuttgart, 1954), pp. 102-104; *Idem*, *Das Zeitalter Justinians*, (Berlin, 1959), p. 503, n. 929.

rather than change their religion. To the Jews, too, he decreed that anyone found hiding a Christian in his house would be burned alive and his property confiscated. This decree affected the whole region of South Arabia.

Following this success, Dhu Nuwas went on to another important Ethiopian centre, Nagran, in the north of South Arabia. As in Zafar, here also was based a large Ethiopian garrison and Christianity was expanding rapidly among the inhabitants of the town. Because of its commercial importance, there were many Christians from the Mediterranean area, but none of them had heard the news of the event in Zafar. Dhu Nuwas knew that Nagran was a well-fortified town and it was not possible to occupy it by force, so he applied the same strategy that he had used in Zafar. He sent a letter to the leader of the Christian community, Harith (Arethas). ²⁹ This letter contained instructions to send the whole garrison of Ethiopian soldiers to him immediately without delay, for he was under attack by heathens and he badly needed the help of the Ethiopians. Arethas then gathered together the Ethiopians and told them what Dhu Nuwas had said in his letter. The Ethiopians expressed their willingness to help Dhu Nuwas and set out forthwith. Before they reached the camp of the Prince, however, they met a Christian who inquired where they were going. They informed him that they were going to help Dhu Nuwas who had been attacked by pagans. The Christian then asked them whether they knew of the event which had taken place in Zafar, and he described to them the massacre of the Christians there. The soldiers then returned to Nagran. When Dhu Nuwas saw that his ruse had failed, he sent an expedition to Nagran. The army could not capture the town but created great destruction outside. Then they sent a message to the Prince saying that they had failed to capture the town, but his personal presence could ensure success, as the inhabitants would let the Prince in without a fight when they heard of his presence.

Thereupon, Dhu Nuwas collected many soldiers and came to Nagran. He realized that it was not possible to capture the town by military force, so he searched for traitors who could help him. He wrote a letter to the inhabitants of the town, in which he pointed out that he was king of all Arabia and could not understand why they rebelled against him. However, he said that he would forgive them, and he advised them to come to him otherwise he would kill all of them without discrimination. Their property also would be confiscated and the whole town destroyed. When the inhabitants received the letter, they gathered together to decide what to do. Finally they agreed to send a delegation of 150 persons of different nationalities. When the delegation reached the camp of Dhu Nuwas, he rebuked them for their rebellion and told them to change their religion to Judaism. Without exception all of them refused and Dhu Nuwas ordered the army to execute them on the spot. Then he captured the town, killed the Christians who refused to change their religion, and burnt the churches.

Zachariah ³⁰ of Metylene includes in his chronicle the following letter, supposedly from Dhu Nuwas to Mundhir, which throws some more light on the event:

"The king whom the Ethiopians set up in our country died, and, because the winter season had begun, they were not able to march out into our country and appoint a Christian king, as they generally do. Accordingly, I became king over the whole country of the Homerites, and I resolved first to slay all Christians who confessed Christ, unless they became Jews like us. And I killed 280 men, the priests who were found and besides them also the Ethio-

²⁹ A. Moberg, *The Book of the Himyarites*, pp. CV and CXII.

³⁰ The Bishop of Metylene died between 536-553.

pians, who were guarding the church. And I made their church into a synagogue for us. And then with a force of 120,000 men I went to Najrin, their royal city. And when I had sat down before it for some days and was not able to take it, I swore oaths to them, and their chiefs came out to me; but I judged it right not to keep my word to the Christians my enemies. And I arrested them, and required them to bring their gold and their silver and their possessions; and they brought them to me and I took them. And I asked for Paul their bishop; and, when they told me that he was dead, I did not believe them, until they showed his grave; and I dug up his bones and burnt them, as well as their church and their priests and everyone who was found seeking refuge there...³¹

The literary sources are supported by inscriptions. One of these, the Kew-Kab inscription, found 50 miles to the northeast of the great desert on the route to Nagran reads:

"The *qayl* Sarah-'il Yaqbul b. Sarah-b-'il Yakmul, banu Yaz'an and Gadanum and Nasa'an and Habum and Gaba'. In this inscription are written down, *istrw*, the things they accomplished in a campaign by wadi beds and a river valley for their lord the king Yusuf 'As'ar against the *'ahabis* in Zafar. Now they overthrew the church, *qlsn*. Then the king marched to 'As'aran and appointed him over an army. And he laid waste Muhwan (Mukha) and killed all its inhabitants and overthrew the church. And he laid waste all the forts of Sammar and its plain. And the king made a surprise attack on 'As'aran. And all that the troops of the king slew and took as booty was collected, *igm'*, 13,000 slain and 9,500 prisoners and 280,000 camels and oxen and goats. And thereupon the king appointed him to join against Nagran amongst the heads of families of bani 'Az'an, *qrm bn 'z'n*, and among the tribes of Hamdan and their city, and their Arabs, and the Arabs of Kiddat and Murad and Madhig. And the king ordered that *sslt mabn* (or *mddn*: chains of servitude?) should be fastened, *hrzy*, on files of the Habasat, *bmqrnt hbst*, and to the 'man' of San'a, *wlsn'n*. In his armies and with him were Lahay'at Yarhum and Sumu-yafa Aswa' and Sarah-b-'il 'As'ad, sept Yaz'an, with their tribe the men of Za'an. In the month, Dhu Qayzan of 633. Now may The God to whom the heaven and the earth belong protect the king Yusuf against his enemies, and may this inscription be under the ban of the Merciful against any who would erase or deface it. O Merciful, show Thy mercy for ever. Thou art Lord."³²

Dhu Nuwas himself in the following inscription sums up the whole affair: "--- and so, what acquired and took as spoil the king in his campaign (amounts to) twelve thousand five hundred war trophies and eleven thousand captives and two hundred ninety thousand camels and bovines and sheep. And has written this inscription the ruler, Sarah-'il Yaqbul, he of (the clan of) Yaz'an, when he fought against Nagran along with the tribe of Hamdan, both townsmen and nomads, and the striking forces from the 'Az'anites and the nomads of Kiddat, and Mardum and Madhigum and the rulers, his brothers, (there was) against the king an attack by sea from Habasat, and they had to strengthen the sand dunes of Maddabān. And all that they have related in this inscription, (concerns) war trophies and booty and military campaigns; but with regard to

the campaign, its end at which they rejoined their homes, (came) in thirteen month And may Rahmanān bless their sons, Sarahbi'il Yakmul and Ha'an 'As'ar, son of Lahay'at, and Lahay'at Yarham, son of Sumayfa', and Martad'ilān Yamga son of Sarahi'il, those of Yaz'an. In the month Madra'an, in thirty-three and si hundred. And under the protection of heaven and the loyalty and the strengt of the soldiers this inscription (is placed) against any injurer and beguiler; an may Rahmanān subdue any beguiler who would (attempt to) erase it (which) wa drawn up and written and ordered in the name of Rahmanān. Drew up (th inscription) Tamimum, he of Hadayat, Lord of the Jewry. By the Praised One."³³

The expedition took place during the winter, beginning in November³⁴ and lastin until the end of April. During this period, the monsoon winds blew from east to we and communication with South Arabia was impossible.³⁵ Dhu Nuwas took advantag of this fact to realize his plan because the Ethiopians who were in South Arabia at the time were unable to contact Aksum to obtain help from there. After conquering the whol region which had been previously occupied by the Ethiopians, he then took steps t prevent any future assistance from Aksum. To this effect, he blocked the ports with iro chains so that no ship might pass, because he was expecting reinforcements to arriv from Aksum when the wind changed its direction in the month of June. The casualtie he inflicted were very heavy. If we accept his account, there were 3,000 dead, 950 prisoners and the booty consisted of 280,000 animals.³⁶

The persecution of Dhu Nuwas is known in history as the persecution of Nagran because the Greek and other Middle Eastern writers heard about the persecution only in this area, whereas in reality the persecution took place throughout the whole of Soutl Arabia wherever a Christian community existed. A certain Simeon Beth Arsham, who had escaped from Nagran, informed the Christians of the Middle East, by writing a lette about this particular persecution. Another, an anonymous Greek author, also presente the story of the persecution to the Emperor of Constantinople under the title "The Marty rdom of Arethas", written in Greek. A detailed description of the persecution under th title *The Book of the Himyarites*,³⁷ written in Syriac by another anonymous Christian writer was sent to the Syrian Christians.

We do not know with absolute certainty whether any such message was sent to the king of Ethiopia or not. We are told in *The Book of the Himyarites* that a Christian lady, whose name was Hammayya, came to Ethiopia and informed the bishop, Eutropius and Emperor Caleb. According to Arabian evidence, the King of Ethiopia was informe by a certain inhabitant of Nagran, Daur Dhu Thalaban by name, who had escaped th massacre. He brought to the Emperor of Ethiopia the news of the destruction of his city carrying with him as a visible symbol, a half-burnt copy of the Gospel. He begged Eles boas (Caleb) and the Abyssinian bishop Eutropius to help his country by making wa against Dhu Nuwas.

All the informants apparently exaggerated the facts in order to arouse the Christian

31. *The Syriac Chronicle known as that of Zachariah of Metylene*, trans. F.J. Hamilton and E.W. Brooks, (London, 1899), pp. 193-194.

32. S. Smith, "Events in Arabia in the 6th Century A.D.", p. 458.

33. A. Jamme, *Sabaeen and Hasaeen Inscriptions from Saudi Arabia*, (Rome, 1966), p. 41.

34. J. Ryckmans, *La persécution des chrétiens himyarites au sixième siècle*, p. 17.

35. "From the beginning of April until the end of October the winds are westerly, so that no one can sai towards the west; and again 'tis just the contrary from the month of October till March. From th middle of May till the end of October the winds blow so hard that ships which by that time have no reached the ports whither they are bound, run a desperate risk, and if they escape, it is a great luck." Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, ed. H. Cordier, vol. III, (Hakluyt Society), 2nd Series, vol. 38, p. 66

36. J. Ryckmans, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

37. *The Book of the Himyarites*, trans. Axel Mobberg, (Lund, 1924).

against the persecutors. The news was received with indignation on all sides. The only two Emperors capable of taking any action were the Byzantine and Ethiopian Emperors. As Vasiliev says, the former was "the champion of the Chalcedonian Creed; outside its official boundaries Justin was the protector of Christianity in general, no matter whether the outlying or not".³⁸ The latter however was the *de facto* sovereign of South Arabia, and the cultural and economic links were very close. It was more than a question of loss of prestige for the Ethiopian emperor; it involved a loss of man-power as well as of material. Indignation in Ethiopia was, therefore, stronger than it was in the Christian world in general.

3. The Response of the Christian World

Justin I wrote a letter to the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, Timothy III, (518-535) in which he asked him to persuade the Ethiopian emperor, Caleb, to avenge the Christian blood shed in Arabia. What he himself contributed to this war, from the point of view of man-power and material, is not very clear. Contemporary writers like Procopius and Cosmas remained silent on this issue. Later Byzantine and Arab writers mention that Justin I supplied warships to Caleb.³⁹ The authenticity of this information is, however, doubtful.

That Caleb did collect warships from different ports is certain, as is stated in the *Martyrium Arethae*. These ships numbered sixty in all, fifteen coming from Elath, on the Gulf of Aqaba; twenty from Clysmā, on the Gulf of Suez; seven from Iotabe, the island of Tiran; two from Berenice; seven from Pharasan in Persia; and nine from India.

It seems that the foreign ships came for commercial rather than military purposes, and Caleb hired them to transport his army to South Arabia. In this connection, Cosmas Indicopleustes writes: "On the coast of Ethiopia, two miles off from the shore, is a town called Adulē, which forms the port of the Axōmites and is much frequented by traders who come from Alexandria and the Elanitic Gulf".⁴⁰ On another occasion, underlining the commercial activities of Adulis, he names other countries which were trading with it, "and many other articles of merchandise, which they afterwards sent by sea to Adulē, to the country of the Homerites, and to Further India, and to Persia".⁴¹ It is thus better to say that the contribution of Justin I was limited only to moral support.

The Patriarch, Timothy III, sent twelve priests to Ethiopia to the court of Caleb to present his letter to the emperor. The envoys of the Patriarch found the emperor already preparing himself for the expedition against Dhu Nuwas. He had given an order that 70 large and 100⁴² small ships were to be built at Adulis, on the pattern of the Indian ones which had been completed. About the art of ship building Procopius comments: "The Indians and Aethiopians possess neither iron nor any other thing suitable for such purposes".⁴³

38. A.A. Vasiliev, "Justin and Abyssinia": *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 33 (1933), p. 72; *Idem.*, *Justin the First*, (Harvard, 1950), pp., 251-252

39. Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sassaniden* (Leyden, 1879), p. 188 ff; G.F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, (London, 1951), p. 43, n. 46. In *Acta Arethas* (p. 743), there is an alleged letter of Justin I to Elesbas in which he writes that he will send the Brethren and the nomads of Nubia to assist him in conquering his enemy. Chrysostomos Papadopoulos believes that both the Byzantine and Aksumite emperors intervened in South Arabian affairs and that after the victory, priests were sent as missionaries to South Arabia. See his *Church History of Alexandria*, (Alexandria, 1935), p. 443. (Greek)

40. Cosmas, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

42. Pereira, *Historia dos Martyres de Nagran*, p. 122.

43. Procopius, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

Ships were bound together with a kind of cording and the construction of these ships took one year. When completed they were sufficiently large and impressive to inspire the early Arab poets. Tarafah, one of the leading poets of the pre-Islamic period composed the following lines:

"When the lady of Malik rides her camel at dawn, her litter appears like a large ship in the midst of the valley of Dad, one of the ships of Adulis or of l'bn Yamin, which the mariner now turns aside and now directs straight ahead; its prow cuts through the foam of the water as a gambler divides the dust with his hands."⁴⁴

Altogether Caleb collected a total of 230 ships from sources within the country and from overseas and they were anchored at a port called Gabazan,⁴⁵ near Adulis, perhaps because it was more spacious than the latter.

According to some sources, before actually embarking on his journey, Caleb sent by land 15,000 soldiers to attack Saba from the south and he himself intended to cross the Red Sea by ship and attack from the west. The 15,000 soldiers, however, perished in the desert from lack of food and water and from the extreme climatic conditions.⁴⁶ There were no survivors.

After Pentecost he planned to lead the army in person against Dhu Nuwas. Before that, he went to the Cathedral of Aksum and prayed to God for help. He also went to *Abba* Pentelēwon, one of the Nine Saints, who was living in a cave near Aksum and asked to be remembered in his prayers. Pentelēwon promised him that he would not cease praying and encouraged him by saying that he would return to Aksum victorious. The army is said to have numbered 120,000. This is probably the first expedition which took place in 523 A.D.⁴⁷ The size of the army, however, was probably smaller than the figure of 70,000 given by Tabari.⁴⁸

Dhu Nuwas knew that when the monsoon wind stopped blowing from east to west, the emperor of Ethiopia would certainly attempt to retaliate against him. After blocking the harbour entrances with chains, he stationed his army on the coast to prevent the disembarkation of Caleb's army in South Arabia. Of course he had no naval force to repulse the Aksumites at sea. In addition to infantry, he deployed cavalry along the coast, and some horsemen actually rode down into the water to prevent the ships from landing. The ships arrived safely at the coast near Mokha, which was the main port⁴⁹ of South Arabia at that time; but they had to remain off-shore. Caleb then took twelve ships with him and sailed further to the east hoping to be able to land somewhere in that direction. But Dhu Nuwas immediately sent his army by land in the same direction to prevent him from landing. In the meantime, the Ethiopians began to suffer from a shortage of food

44. Tarafah, Mu'allaqat II, 3-5, trans. G.F. Hourani, *op. cit.*, p. 3; cf. W.A. Clouston, *Arabian Poetry*, (Glasgow, 1881), p. 16.

45. Sudström, locates this place not far from the site of old Adulis. (C. Conti Rossini "Aethiopica": *RSO* 9 (1923), p. 375).

46. *Acta Yared et Pantalewon*, p. 53. (text); *Acta Sanctorum*, Octobris, p. 747.

47. The Greek writers, (John Malalas, Migne PG. XCVII, col. 640; Simeon Metaphrastes, Migne PG. CXV, col. 1250; George Cedrenius, Migne PG. CXXI, col. 696.) emphasize the point that the war took place in the fifth year of Justin's reign which was 523 A.D.

48. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, vol. II., p. 244; B. Rubin, *Das Zeitalter Justins*, (Berlin, 1959), p. 307.

49. Procopius describes this port: "Now the harbour of the Homeritae from which they are accustomed to put to sea for the voyage to Aethiopia is called Bulicas; and at the end of the sail across the sea they always put in at the harbour of the Adulitae". (*History of the Wars*, *op. cit.*, p. 183 (version).

and, ironically, lack of fresh drinking water (they had food provisions for twenty days only), while the army of Dhu Nuwas on the coast was suffering from the heat.

At last, the emperor succeeded in landing on the eastern front and began an offensive against the main camp of Dhu Nuwas. Dhu Nuwas was opposed on two fronts, and he realized that he was not in a position to withstand a double attack, so he retreated and fled to the mountains. In a broken Sabaean inscription from the reign of Sumuyafa' 'Aswa' at Constantinople it says, "that king with a mounted force, *hilm*, and with their army with the king... overcame them at the surge of the sea".⁵⁰ Caleb came victorious to Zafar. There he restored the churches which had been destroyed by Dhu Nuwas and he gave encouragement to the Christian population. He also appointed Sumuyafa' 'Aswa', whom Procopius calls Esimiphæus,⁵¹ as a ruler of the Ethiopian territory in South Arabia. Sumuyafa' 'Aswa' was Himyarite by birth but Christian by belief, and his appointment served the purpose well. As he was a descendant of a local prince, his authority would be respected and recognized. Yet because of his Christian belief, he would remain loyal to Caleb. The *Inscription of Istanbul* 7608, although broken on both sides, clearly demonstrates this idea:

"... holy spirit, Sam-yafi' Ashwa' king of S (aba and? Marthad-ilan A) hasan' & Sam-yafi' Ashwa' sons of Shurah-b-il.....their princes the Neguses of Aksum.....the king Il-asbahah, King of the Habashat?...kings over Himyar and vice-roys, for the Neguses of A(ksum...) to obey the kings of Aksum...dhu Yazan and Hassan and Shurah -b-il dhi-Ma'-faran... and Samyafi' dhu-'Abdan and Zur'at dhu-Marhabam... their father Shurah-b-il Yakmil and H...in the name of Rahmanan and his son Christ victorious."⁵²

G.Ryckmans gives a somewhat better translation of the text.⁵³

- 1.....Es[prit saint. Sumyafa' 'Aswa', roi de Sa[ba].....
- 2.....'A]hsan, et Sumyafa' 'Aswa' fils de Sarahbi'il [L.....
- 3.....leurs [sei] gneurs, les négus de 'Aksumân, ont construit et fon[dé].....
- 4.....leurs [f] orces Mulaykiyum et Qayliyum, qu'a achevé Du.....
- 5.....ce roi avec force et avec leur armée de la part du ro[i].....
- 6.....le[s]roi[s] 'Ella-A[s]bahah, roi des Abyssins.....
- 7.....roi pour Himyarum et contrôleurs pour les négus de 'A[ksumân].....
- 8.....soit asservi aux rois de 'Aksumân et.....
- 9.....la mer et pour la prospérité de H.....
- 10.....Du]Yaz'an, et Hasan, et Sarahbi'il, tous deux du clan de Ma'âfi[rân].....
- 11.....Aswadân, et Sum-yafi' , Du-'Abadân, et.....
- 12.....cla]n de Halil, et Zur'at, clan de Marhabum, et Malikum.....
- 13.....rum, et Harijūm et Martadum, de la tribu de Tu'habân.....
- 14.....Ella'Asbaha]h (?) négus de 'Aksumân. Et tandis qu'ils confièrent et firent prospérer.....
- 15.....Hagan, leur père Sarahbi'il Yakmul, et.....
- 16.....au]nom du Miséricordieux et de son fils Christ le victorieux.....

After Emperor Caleb's victory, his army was left to assist in maintaining peace and order in South Arabia, and he returned to his capital city, Aksum. But the situation

50. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

51. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, (London, Loeb Classical Library, 1961) p. 191 (version).

52. H. St. J.B. Philby, "Note on the Last Kings of Saba": *Muséon* 63, (1950), p. 272.

53. "Une inscription chrétienne sabéenne aux musées d'Antiquités d'Istanbul": *Muséon* 59 (1946), pp. 171-172. For the Italian translation see C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, p. 180.

in South Arabia had not greatly changed. Dhu Nuwas, hearing of the Emperor's departure, again began attacking the Ethiopian garrison there. Moreover, from the very beginning, it does not seem that there was harmony between the army and Sumuyafa' 'Aswa' and this in turn aided the purpose of Dhu Nuwas. After equipping and preparing himself well, Dhu Nuwas began attacking the Ethiopians with ferocity. The news soon travelled to Aksum and Caleb prepared another expedition and came for the second time to South Arabia in 525 A.D. Once again, Dhu Nuwas had to face the enemy on two fronts: Caleb by sea, and inland, the Ethiopian garrison.⁵⁴ This time he could not escape his fate. The Arab tradition says "when he saw the fate that had befallen him and his people, he returned to the sea and setting spurs to his horse, rode through the shallows until he reached the deep water. Then he plunged into the waves and nothing more of him was seen".⁵⁵

After the final defeat of Dhu Nuwas, there was no radical change in administration. The only innovation was the appointment of Abreha as commander of the Ethiopian garrison there. Procopius says: "Now this Abamos was a Christian, but a slave of a Roman citizen who was engaged in the business of shipping in the city of Adulis in Ethiopia".⁵⁶ Whether this statement of Procopius is accurate or not we do not know for sure, but it can hardly have been customary in the Aksumite court to promote a slave to a general. Perhaps Abreha had previously been the commercial representative of Caleb at Adulis, and this misled Procopius. If we trust our source, Abreha assumed his office by official act. He was crowned in the biggest church at Zafar, Holy Trinity Church, by Caleb in the presence of the army. The army acclaimed Caleb, Abreha and Grigentius, one after another. Caleb later held a big reception on this occasion and stayed on for thirty three days to see how things would go. When he saw that everything was in order, he returned to Aksum, leaving behind 5,000 men with Abreha to maintain peace and order in the Yemen.⁵⁷

Before his departure from South Arabia, Caleb the Just, as he was called in the *Book of the Himyarites*, most likely erected a monument with Ge'ez inscriptions. So far we have two very fragmented inscriptions found in South Arabia. In 1911, A. Grohmann published⁵⁸ a Ge'ez inscription engraved on an alabaster lamp. The exact location of the inscription is not known. D.H. Müller sent it to him from Aden, however this was not the place of origin. Most probably someone had brought it from one of those places where the Aksumites were active in the sixth century. Since this lamp was attached to another object when the inscription was engraved, it contains only part of the text:

Text

Translation

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1... ዘደገገ ወደቀ |Zadagan and has fallen..... |
| 2... ደ]ቂቶ አገጥሶ ጸ ርዐ] |(S)ons and his 2 brothers a(nd)... |
| 3... ም]ረ ብሔርሙ [ሰ] |? and their land..... |
| 4... ነ እንዘ ? [ሰ] |While..... |
| 5... እስከ ፀርቦ [ገ] |till the (sun) set..... |

54. Tabari says that Abreha landed in the Hadramawt with 100,000 soldiers, thus having a decisive effect upon the war. *Chronique*, trans. M.H. Zotenberg, vol. II, p. 184.

55. *Ibid.*; R. Nicolson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, (London, 1907), p. 27.

56. Procopius, *op. cit.*, p. 191; N. Pigulevskaja, in her article, "Les rapports sociaux à Nedjran": *JESHO* 3 (1960), based on this source, says that Abreha was a slave from his mother's side and she concludes... "tout cela prouve qu'un grand nombre d' esclaves participaient à la vie domestique." (p. 125)

57. *Homertarum Leges*, Migne, PG. LXXXVI, cols. 569-572 (Greek).

58. A. Grohmann, "Eine Alabasterlampe mit einer Ge'ezinschrift": *Wiener Zeitschrift fuer die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 25 (1911), pp. 410-422.

- 6... ዘ ይገባ [ኡ] ...?they return.....
 7.....
 8.....

Among the legible words, only Zadagan is unknown. A. Grohmann believes that it was the proper name of a prince.⁵⁹ The text appears to refer to a period of warfare⁶⁰ and perhaps it is dealing with the expedition of Caleb.

The second inscription was found in 1947 by the Egyptian archaeologist, Ahmad Fakhry, at Marib.⁶¹ It was engraved on a broken alabaster stele. The inscription was translated and published by Kamel Murad in 1964.⁶²

Text	Translation
1...]ወተ[	
2... ወያቢያክ	...exalt you.....
3... [ተ] ዓዶኩ መርስ (Sic) ዛለ [	...I sailed out to the port.....
4... ለ ምስሉ አሕዛቢ...	...with (my) people.....
5... ከ] መ ይቤ መዝሙር ይ [	...a (s) it said in the Psalm (let God) ar(ise)
6...]ቱ እምቅድመ ገጹ[	...(fi)ee before him
7... ወደውም ወበርበረ	...and they took him captive and plundered...
8... ሰደደ አሕዛቢ እምቅ[ድ መ	...he expelled the people before [him]
9... ቀ] ነጉኩ ውስተ ሐመር [	...I girdle in a ship.....
10... ታ] ሐይቃ ዘመጠደኒ እ[...	...God enable me to avenge.....
11...]መራን ወመገረቱ አሕ...	...half of my peo(ple).....
12...]ዛብዩ ወረደ እንተ ቀርጾ	...disembarked on the shore.....
13... [ወመን] ፈቱ አሕዛብዩ ወረደ	...(ha)lf of my people disembarked.....

Kamel Murad attributes this inscription to Caleb and believes it to have been an official declaration of Ella Asbeha.⁶³ The existence of an inscription by Caleb at Marib opens a new chapter in the history of Christian persecution in Arabia in the sixth century. The previously known literary as well as archaeological sources have excluded Marib from any involvement in the affair. The discovery of this inscription, however, seems to indicate that Marib was indeed involved.

Apart from their historical value, both these inscriptions have considerable literary significance. They show the constant development of Ge'ez, both externally and internally. If we compare these two texts with the Christian inscriptions of Ezana, we find a marked development in Ge'ez. The construction of sentences is simple. As in later times, the sixth century text has many passages from the Bible and the vocabulary is wholly understandable. The punctuation has improved; the vertical lines used earlier to separate one word from another have been replaced by two parallel dashes(=). The script is also very clear, the shape of the letters being similar to those of the manuscripts of the 14th and 15th centuries. They also throw light on the development of Ge'ez orthography, which is so much neglected by modern writers. The use of Biblical passages is important

59. *Ibid.*, p. 414.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 413.

61. A. Fakhry, *An Archaeological Journey to Yemen*, (Cairo, 1951), p. 119.

62. Murad Kamel, "An Ethiopic Inscription found at Mareb": *JSS*, 9 (1964), pp. 56-57; with a slight emendation of the text, A. Caquot republished it in 1965 under the title: "L'inscription éthiopienne de Marib": *AE* 6 (1965), pp. 223-226.

63. Kamel Murad, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

for the study of Biblical criticism and provides some information about the existence of a standard Ge'ez version.

4. Caleb and Justinian I

According to Ethiopian sources, sometime after his return, Caleb abdicated from the throne and embraced the ascetic life until his death. This event has been reaffirmed by later Byzantine writers. However, there seems to have been a lapse of time between his return and his abdication because we learn from Byzantine sources that Caleb received two ambassadors from Byzantine emperors. The first was the mission of Julian, sent by Justinian. Procopius gives the following description of the mission:

At that time, when Hellestheaeus was reigning over the Aethiopians, and Esimiphaeus over the Homeritae, the Emperor Justinian sent an ambassador, Julianus, demanding that both nations on account of their community of religion should make common cause with the Romans in the war against the Persians; for he proposed that the Aethiopians, by purchasing silk from India and selling it among the Romans, might themselves gain much money, while causing the Romans to profit in only one way, namely, that they be no longer compelled to pay over their money to their enemy. (This is the silk of which they are accustomed to make the garment which of old the Greeks called Medic, but which at the present time they name "seric"). As for the Homeritae, it was desired that they should establish Caisus, the fugitive, as captain over the Maddeni, and with a great army of their own people and of the Maddene Saracens make an invasion into the land of the Persians. The Caisus was by birth of the captain's rank and an exceptionally able warrior, but he had killed one of the relatives of Esimiphaeus and was a fugitive in a land which is utterly destitute of human habitation. So each king, promising to put this demand into effect, dismissed the ambassador, but neither one of them did the things agreed upon by them. For it was impossible for the Aethiopians to buy silk from the Indians, for the Persian merchants always locate themselves at the very harbour where the Indian ships first put in, (since they inhabit the adjoining country), and are accustomed to buy the whole cargoes; and it seemed to the Homeritae a difficult thing to cross a country which was a desert and which extended so far that a long time was required for the journey across it, and then to go against a people much more warlike than themselves. Later on Abramus too, when at length he had established his power most securely, promised the Emperor Justinian many times to invade the land of Persia, but only once began the journey and then straightway turned back. Such then were the relations which the Romans had with the Aethiopians and the Homeritae.⁶⁴

Intended to be a commercial agreement in which the Byzantine emperor pursued two objects for himself; to be free both from Persian control and from the heavy taxes which were imposed by the Persians as a consequence of their political relations with Byzantium. There is no doubt that the Ethiopians were in a position to undertake the task. They had their own ships and experienced merchant seamen. But in competition with Persia in the Far-Eastern trade they faced the drawback of distance, as Ethiopia was located far from India and the journey by sea took a long time. Furthermore, the Ethiopians could sail only at a certain time of the year when the monsoon wind was blowing

64. Procopius, *op. cit.*, I, XX, 9-13, (ed. and trans. Dewing pp. 193 & 195) (version).

in the right direction, whereas Persia, as a neighbouring country to India, was less affected by the monsoon winds. The Persians traded regularly at the Indian ports in goods for Byzantium, in particular, silk, for which there was great demand. When the Ethiopian ships arrived, they found nothing left. Byzantium ultimately found another solution to the problem. Two monks were sent to China, and on their return, they brought the eggs of the silk-worm with them, hidden in their sticks, and silk-production was thus introduced into the Byzantine Empire. This happened not long after 552 A.D., during the reign of Justinian I.

In connection with this mission of Julian, John Malalas gives us the following details:

"The Roman Emperor, on hearing from Rufinus (in 530) of the evasions of Koad, sent the *sacra* (rescript) to the King of the Auxumitai. That king of the Indians, after making an attack on the king of the Ameritai Indians and winning a great victory, took his kingdom and his entire land. And he appointed instead of him as king, one of his own race, Anganes, since the kingdom of the Ameritai Indians was also now subject to him. The Roman ambassador, after sailing to Alexandria, reached the Indian parts by the Nile and the Red Sea. And when he came into the king's presence, the king of the Indians was carried away with joy, because he had long thought it right that he should secure an alliance with the Roman Emperor. According to the account given by the ambassador himself, when the king of the Indians received him, he set down in writing the appearance of the royal audience. The king was naked, round his body at the loins a cloth of linen and gold, and he was wearing, on belly and shoulders, straps with pearls, and more than five armlets, and gold rings on his hands. A gold and linen fasciola was bound on his head, with four ribbons hanging on either side, and there was a golden collar on his neck. He stood above four elephants, which bore a platform with four wheels, and above as it were a high car bound round with golden leaves, as are the cars of the archons of the eparchies, and he stood thereon holding a small shield, gilded, two little lances, also gilded, in his hands. And all his notables were there in arms and flutes making music for chanting.

And the Roman ambassador, on being presented, made obeisance by bending the knee. 'And the king of the Indians ordered that I should rise and be led to him'. And on accepting the *sacra* of the Roman Emperor, he kissed the seal. On further accepting the presents sent by the Emperor, he admired them. After breaking the seal and listening to the letter in translation, he found that it included proposals that he should arm against Koad, the Persian king, and ravage the land bordering on his, and, in future, should have no further commerce with him, but conduct business with Egypt in Alexandria, through the land of the Ameritai Indians he ruled, by way of the Nile. And immediately the king of the Indians, Elesboas, under the inspection of the Roman ambassador, set war in motion against the Persians. After sending in advance even the Saracens, Indians subject to him, he marched into the Persian territory on behalf of the Romans, sending word to the Persian king that he should expect the attack of the king of the Indians, at war with him, and that he would pillage all the land over which the Persians ruled. And while these events were in progress, the king of the Indians, after ordering the presence of the Roman ambassador and giving him the kiss of peace, dismissed him with every consideration. For he also sent *sacra* by an Indian ambassador and presents for the Emperor."⁶⁵

The purpose of the mission described here is also identical with that given by Procopius - commercial links with the Romans and common military action against the Persians. The difference is that here the description is detailed and to a certain extent, exaggerated. About common military action, we will see later when we discuss the situation of Arabia after the victory.

The second Byzantine delegation to Aksum was led by Nonnosus in 533 A.D.; Caleb was still emperor at that time, Nonnosus, being a professional diplomat in the court of Justinian, knew many oriental languages and was sent frequently to different courts of the East. Because of his diplomatic experience, Justinian chose him to carry his message to Caleb at Aksum. About the nature of this mission, we have no concrete source. Unfortunately, the book which he wrote about his journey to Aksum has been lost; only the following small fragment has been preserved in the *Myriobylos* of Photius:

"Read the history of Nonnosus, containing the description of his embassy to the Aethiopians, Amerites, and Saracens the most powerful nation, as well as to other Eastern peoples. At this time Justinian was emperor of the Romans and Caisus, chief of the Saracens. This Caisus was the grandson of Arethas, himself a chief to whom Nonnosus' grandfather was sent as ambassador during the reign of Anastasius, to conclude a treaty of peace. Nonnosus' father, Abrames, had in like manner been sent on an embassy to Alamundarus, chief of the Saracens, during the reign of Justin and was successful in procuring the release of Timostratus and John, two Roman generals who were prisoners of war. Caisus, to whom Nonnosus was sent was chief of the two illustrious Saracen tribes, the Chindeni and Maadeni. Before Nonnosus was appointed ambassador, his father had been sent to this same Caisus by Justinian, and had concluded a treaty of peace, on condition that Caisus' son, Mavias, should be taken as a hostage to Byzantium. After this, Nonnosus was entrusted with a threefold mission, to Caisus to induce him, if possible, to visit the Emperor, to Elesbaas, king of the Axumites, and to the Amerites. Axumis, is a very large city and may be considered the capital of Aethiopia; it lies more south and east than the Roman Empire. Nonnosus, in spite of the treacherous attacks of tribesmen, and perils from wild beasts and many difficulties and dangers on the journey, successfully accomplished his mission and returned in safety to his native land.

He relates that Caisus after Abrames had been sent to him a second time, set out for Byzantium, having previously divided his chieftaincy between his brothers, Ambrus and Yezid. He brought a large number of his subjects with him, and was appointed administrator of Palestine by the Emperor....

He tells us that Adulis is fifteen days' journey from Axumis. On his way there, he and his companions saw a remarkable sight in the neighbourhood of Auê (Avê) midway between Axumis and Adulis; this was a large number of elephants, nearly 5,000. They were feeding in a large plain and the inhabitants found it difficult to approach them or drive them from their pasture. This was what they saw on their journey.

We must also say something about climatic contrarities of summer and winter between Avê and Axumis. 'When the sun enters Cancer, Leo and Virgo, it is summer as far as Avê as with us, and the atmosphere is extremely dry; but from Avê to Axumis and the rest of Aethiopia, it is severe winter, not throughout the day, but beginning from midday the sky being covered with clouds and the country flooded with violent rains. At that time also the Nile, spreading over

65. Trans. S. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 449-450.

Egypt, overflows and irrigates the land. But when the sun enters Capricornus Aquarius, and Pisces, the atmosphere, conversely floods the country of the Adulites as far as Avê, while it is summer from Avê to Axumis and the rest of Aethiopia and the fruits of the earth are ripe." 66

Most probably Nonnosus came to Aksum to seek an alliance with Caleb to fight against the Persians. The basis of this alliance was their common religion, the Christian faith. Although doctrinal differences existed between their beliefs, in the face of external enemies, they were ready to cast aside these differences and face the enemy together. Theoretically at least, it appears that Nonnosus succeeded in securing the assistance of Caleb.

As mentioned previously, another traveller who visited the Aksumite empire was Cosmas Indicopleustes who was at Adulis when Caleb was preparing an expedition against South Arabia. He also supplied us with information about the city of Aksum, the life and commercial activities of Ethiopia and the expansion and consolidation of Christianity. He visited Aksum in person and so speaks of what "we ourselves saw with our own eyes in the parts of Axômis in Ethiopia." 67

In support of his theories about the universe and the zones or climates of the Earth, he has the following to say:

"So then quite clearly the shadow in the climate of Axômê, a city of the Ethiopians, is found projecting more than a foot to the south, so that everything goes to show that, if the sun in his passage through the summer tropic be between Syênê and Axômis, he has the size of two climates." 68

This work includes some fascinating comments upon animal life:

"The Ethiopians in their own dialect call the rhinoceros *Arou*, or *Harisi*, aspirating the *alpha* of the latter word, and adding *risi*. By the *arou* they designate the beast as such, and by *arisi*, ploughing, giving him this name from his shape about the nostrils, and also from the use to which his hide is turned. In Ethiopia I once saw a live rhinoceros while I was standing at a far distance, and I saw also the skin of a dead one stuffed with chaff, standing in the royal palace, and so I have been able to draw him accurately." 69

Other animals mentioned are the taurelaphus or bull-stag, the cameleopard, or giraffe and the fabled unicorn:

"The taurelaphus is an animal found in India and in Ethiopia... The Ethiopian kind, unlike the Indian, are wild and have not been domesticated... Cameleopards are found only in Ethiopia. They also are wild creatures and undomesticated. In the palace one or two that, by command of the King, have been caught when young, are tamed to make a show for the King's amusement." 70

Of the monoceros or unicorn, Cosmas has this to say: "This animal is called the unicorn, but I cannot say that I have seen him. But I have seen four brazen figures of him set up in the four-towered palace of the King of Ethiopia." 71

66. *The Library of Photius*, trans. by J.H. Freese, vol. I, pp. 17-19.

67. J.W. McCrindle, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas*, pp. 244-245.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 249.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 358-359.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 359.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 360-361.

At that time, the Emperors used to exile people to a remote part of the country as a punishment, a custom practised until the nineteenth century: "As for the Semênai, where he says there are snows and ice, it is to that country the King of the Axômities expatriates anyone whom he has sentenced to be banished". 72

In regard to commerce, African trade was controlled by the Aksumites:

"The King of the Axomites accordingly, every other year, through the governor of Agau, sends thither special agents to bargain for the gold, and these are accompanied by many other traders - upwards, say, of five hundred - bound on the same errand as themselves. They take along with them to the mining district oxen, lumps of salt, and iron, and when they reach its neighbourhood, they make a halt at a certain spot and form an encampment which they fence round with a great hedge of thorns. Within this they live, and having slaughtered the oxen, cut them in pieces and lay the pieces on the top of the thorns, along with the lumps of salt and the iron. Then come the natives bringing gold in nuggets like peas, called *tancharas*, and lay one or two or more of these upon what pleases them - the pieces of flesh or the salt or the iron, and then they retire to some distance off. Then the owner of the meat approaches, and if he is satisfied he takes the gold away, and upon seeing this its owner comes and takes the flesh or the salt or the iron. If, however, he is not satisfied, he leaves the gold, when the native seeing that he has not taken it, comes and either puts down more gold or takes up what he had laid down, and goes away." 73 This happened far away in the west.

The Horn of Africa was also the source of valuable products.

"The region which produces frankincense is situated at the projecting parts of Ethiopia, and lies inland but is washed by the ocean on the other side. Hence the inhabitants of Barbaria, being near at hand, go up into the interior and, engaging in traffic with the natives, bring back from them many kinds of spices, frankincense, cassia, calamus, and many other articles of merchandise, which they afterwards send by sea to Adulê, to the country of the Homerites, to Further India, and to Persia." 74

The trade of the Blemmyes was also controlled by the Aksumites: "These people set great store by the emerald stone and wear it set in a crown. The Ethiopians who procure this stone from the Blemmyes in Ethiopia, take it into India and, with the price it fetches, they invest in wares of great value." 75 The same can be said about South Arabia. Since this country was ruled at that time by the viceroy of the Aksumites, it is understood that the trade of that region was controlled and directed by them. Cosmas confirms that the Aksumites were the intermediaries of the western world for Indian trade. A very few Greek merchants sailed to India by the Ethiopian ships to select goods of their preference. 76

Concerning religious life, he writes that Christianity had been preached in many parts of Ethiopia at that time: "... and further, the whole, I may almost say, of Ethiopia, and the regions to the south of it, bear testimony to divine scripture." 77 This statement of Cosmas is supported partially at least by archaeological evidence. The English traveller

72. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

73. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 371.

76. *Ibid.*, pp. 368-369.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 380.

Theodore Bent, who visited Sokotra at the dawn of the last century, discovered Ge'ez graffiti "almost exactly similar to those we saw on the steps of the Church and on the hillsides around Aksum in Abyssinia".⁷⁸ On this issue, Bent concluded that: "When the Abyssinian Christian monarchs conquered Arabia in the early centuries of our era and Christianized a large portion of that country, they probably did the same by Sokotra".⁷⁹ This being the case one would expect to find a strong church organization in Ethiopia. Here also the evidence of Cosmas is positive. "... throughout the whole land of Persia there is no limit to the number of churches with bishops and very large communities of Christian people, as well as many martyrs, and monks also living as hermits. So too in Ethiopia and Axôm, and in all the country about it....."⁸⁰ Cosmas obviously visited the regions adjacent to the Red Sea; consequently this information has validity only for this area.

If we consider economic and political ties, the relations between Ethiopia and Byzantium appear to have been friendly. This was not always the case in the religious sphere, however. The approach made by Justin I to the Aksumite Emperor through the Patriarch of Alexandria pertaining to religious matters underlines the fact that the Ethiopian Church was under the jurisdiction of the anti-Chalcedonian Patriarch of Alexandria in both a canonical and doctrinal sense. Justin I differed to a certain degree from his predecessor in this matter. His ardent desire was to secure a uniform teaching of the Church by compromise. Failing to achieve this *desideratum*, he turned against the anti-Chalcedonian Patriarch of Alexandria, Theodosius, the twenty-ninth Prelate of the See of St. Mark. He exiled the Patriarch and replaced him by the Chalcedonian Patriarch, Paul. Obviously this act affected the Ethiopian Church. We have an Arabic source⁸¹ which indicates the reaction in Ethiopia to these new developments.

J.M. Neale condenses this source as follows:

"It happened that the See of Axum became vacant shortly after the ordination of Paul; and the Emperor of Abyssinia, hearing that the Faith of Chalcedon was professed at Alexandria, refused, in common with the King of the Homeritae, where the Episcopal Chair was also vacant, to send thither for a new Metropolitan, but deputed an embassy to Justinian, requesting that the Prince nominate a Prelate who held the Monophysite belief. He refused, although repeatedly solicited to do so; and so great was the antipathy of the Abyssinians to the true doctrine,⁸² that they remained for five and twenty years without any attempt to keep up their succession, nor even to consecrate Priests and Deacons."⁸³

The attempt of the Byzantine Emperor to send a Chalcedonian bishop to Ethiopia had disastrous results. They took him for an Arian and put him to death shortly after his arrival.⁸⁴ On the other hand, the Patriarch of Alexandria, who was in exile, did not leave his flock completely; he sent Dionysius of Halicarnasus to Ethiopia to support the Christians in their faith.

This was the last contact of the period between the Greek world and Ethiopia.

78. J.T. Bent, *Southern Arabia*, (London, 1900), p. 354.

79. *Ibid.*

80. J.W. McCrindle, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas*, p. 120.

81. J.S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, (Rome, 1725), vol. I, p. 384; M. Lequien, *Oriens Christianus* (Paris, 1740), p. 646.

82. Neale was a Roman Catholic.

83. J.M. Neale, *A History of the Holy Eastern Church*, (London, 1847), vol. II, p. 36.

84. Assemani, *op. cit.*, p. 384; L. Duchesne, "Note sur le massacre des chrétiens himyarites au temps de l'Empereur Justin": *Revue des Etudes Juives*, (1890), p. 223; J. Halévy, "Remarque sur un point contesté touchant la persécution de Nedjran": *Revue des Etudes Juives*, (1890), p. 74.

No further descriptions of Ethiopia are found in the literary sources. The later Byzantine writers merely repeat accounts of events during the reign of Caleb and his predecessors.

Concerning the end of Caleb's reign, Ethiopian and Greek sources agree that Caleb voluntarily abdicated the throne and entered monastic life⁸⁵ in the hermitage of *Abba Pentelêwon*, where he ended his days. He sent his crown to Jerusalem to be hung on the Holy Sepulchre. This crown is no longer in existence. If we remember how many times Jerusalem was invaded and sacked by various enemies, it is not surprising that the crown has disappeared. The Ethiopian monks long held a special privilege regarding the Holy Sepulchre which they no longer retain today. They were entrusted with the custody of the light which burns continuously on the tomb of the Lord, and, on the night before Easter, they offered the light to the Patriarch to celebrate the Feast of Resurrection. Probably they acquired this privilege because of Caleb's dedication of his crown.

With the abdication of Caleb, relations between church and state reached a new stage. Previously, in the time of Ezana, the king himself took responsibility for church affairs. Thus it was he who sent Frumentius to Alexandria to be consecrated as bishop of Aksum. He also received a letter from Constantius in which the Emperor asked to have Frumentius sent back to Alexandria to be examined on his ordination. Thus, he was not only the political leader of the country, but he was also invested with religious authority. The king, in other words, was an instrument of the Will of God and as such, the Church fell within his jurisdiction. There was no distinct line separating divine from human institutions. If we think in terms of the Western world, the system prevailing might be termed "Caesaro-papism". But during the reign of Caleb, the situation was quite different. The facts of his dedication of his crown to the Holy Sepulchre and his abdication from the throne and departure to a monastery probably indicate the ascendancy of divine institutions over secular ones. There existed a distinction between the two institutions, and yet it seems clear that, at this period, the dignity and authority of the Church prevailed. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this attitude of Caleb's should be interpreted as a tendency towards "Papo-Cesarism".

Caleb was the second king after Ezana to be canonized by the Ethiopian Church and the first by the Greek and Roman churches. Somewhat surprisingly, he is ignored in the calendar of the Coptic Church. In the Ethiopian calendar, he is revered on the 20th of *Ginbot*, while in Roman and Greek Martyrology his commemoration is observed with the Nagra Martyrs on the 24th of October.⁸⁶ He died in the monastery of *Abba Pentelêwon* where to this day it is believed that his tomb can be found in the crypt of that church. The date of his death can be fixed approximately. In this connection, Procopius says: "When Helléstheaios was dead, Abramios agreed to pay tribute to the successor to the Kingship over the Ethiopians after him".⁸⁷ Sidney Smith suggests that the revolt of Abreha against Caleb occurred in approximately 533.⁸⁸ Caleb lived on some years after this event. We may tentatively place the death of Caleb about the year 535. According to some of the lists of kings, he died after a reign of thirty years.

85. Martyrium Arethae; *Acta Sanctorum*, Oct. X, p. 758.

86. About the canonization of Elesbaas (Caleb) King of Aksum and the Nagra martyrs, most of whom were anti-Chalcedonians, there is the following statement: "The names of the Nagra martyrs and o St. Elesbaas were introduced into the Roman martyrology by Baronius in spite of the fact that all o them were perhaps at least materially, monophysites". *Butlers' Life of the Saints*, edited, revised and supplemented by H. Thurston and D. Attwater (London, 1956), vol. IV, p. 191.

87. S. Smith, "Events in Arabia in the 6th Century A.D.": *BSOAS* 16 (1954), p. 451.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 451

CHAPTER VI

SOUTH ARABIA AFTER CALEB'S EXPEDITIONS

1. The Military Situation

If one can rely on Procopius' version of the event, after the second expedition of Caleb, Sumuyafa' 'Aswa' continued to rule with his two sons. This custom was a very old practice in South Arabia.¹ About 543,² Abreha revolted and seized power. Of this event, Procopius gives the following account:

"Of the Ethiopian army, many slaves and all who had a disposition to lawless behaviour were unwilling to follow the king at all. Left behind, they stayed there, out of a desire to acquire the land of the Homeritai, for it is extremely rich. Not long after this mob, with some others, revolted against Esimphaios and put him in prison in one of the fortresses in that land, appointing another king for the Homeritai, by name Abramos."³

This action provoked the indignation of the Aksumite Emperor, who hastened to send an expeditionary force against Abreha. Procopius says that the Emperor had sent two expeditions, one after another both of which failed to gain a victory.

"On hearing of these events Hellestheaios, seriously desiring to requite Abramos and the rebels for their treatment of Esimphaios, sent an army of 3,000 men against them; and one of his relatives as ruler. This army, men no longer willing to perform their task and return home, but disposed to stay there in a rich land, opened negotiations with Abramos without the knowledge of the ruler, and came to terms with the opponents. When they were in action, they killed the ruler, joined the enemies' army, and stayed there. Very angry, Hellestheaios sent another army too against them, which actually fought an action with the followers of Abramos, but after suffering a severe defeat in battle returned home immediately. Thereafter the Ethiopian king, out of fear, sent no other expedition against Abramos. When Hellestheaios was dead, Abramos agreed to pay tribute to the successor to the kingship over the Ethiopians after him. In this way he secured legitimate rule. But this happened later."⁴

The Arab sources tell of only one expedition, but in other respects the story coincides with the account by Procopius.

In retaliation, the Emperor of Ethiopia sent a punitive expedition to South Arabia

1. S. Smith, "Events in Arabia in the 6th century A.D.": *BSOAS* 16 (1954), p. 459.

2. J. Ryckmans, *L'Institution monarchique*, p. 324.

3. Procopius, *Wars*, I, XX, 2-8, translation S. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 431-432.

which was led by Ariat, one of the most experienced and capable Aksumite generals. Ariat was tall, well-built and of striking appearance. In comparison, Abreha was short and fat. When Ariat arrived in South Arabia with a good number of Aksumite soldiers, Abreha sent him a message saying: "We have the same father-land and the same religion. Both of us are serving the same purpose which is to fight for our father-land and religion. We should not shed the blood of our soldiers; if you like, let the two of us alone fight a duel". Ariat was happy to accept this proposal because he knew his superiority to Abreha in the military arts. However, Abreha planned to rid himself of Ariat by a trick. They decided on the place and time of the duel. There was a trench around the meeting point. In this trench behind Ariat, Abreha hid his servant Arangada. The servant received instructions from Abreha that, in the event of Ariat gaining the upper hand in the combat, he must throw his spear and kill Ariat.

In accordance with the art of duelling, Ariat hurled his spear at Abreha's head. The spear rebounded off his helmet, however, and slashed Abreha across the face, earning him the nickname of "Abreha al-Aschram", the split-nosed. At this moment, Arangada rose from the trench and threw his spear at Ariat, wounding him so badly that he died on the spot. The death of Ariat meant the defeat of the Aksumite army and consequently, the whole army submitted to Abreha and he remained in power as the independent ruler of South Arabia. Abreha then asked Arangada, his servant, what reward he would like. Arangada asked him to allow every bride in Yemen to spend the night before her wedding with him! And since Abreha had promised to give him whatever he asked for, he allowed him this privilege. Arangada enjoyed this right for some time, but eventually the Yemenites could no longer tolerate it and killed him. Abreha actually considered the death of Arangada as a just punishment, so he did not try to avenge the death of the once-trusted servant. In general, Abreha was believed to be fair and reasonable in his administration of the country.

When the Emperor of Aksum heard of the death of his general Ariat, he swore to shed the blood of Abreha and devastate the land in revenge. When Abreha heard this, he wrote him a letter saying: "Oh! King, Ariat, your slave came against me, your power here to weaken and your army to kill. To avoid that, I proposed him a duel in which I killed him. Now the whole kingdom is yours. I ask submission to you. But because you swore that you would shed my blood and trample under your feet my land, I sent a bag full of earth mixed with my blood. You can fulfil your oath by trampling on it. I am your slave, my well-being is yours too". In this way, Abreha reconciled himself with the sovereign and he started to pay tribute to him regularly.⁵

After this Abreha, with the help of Bishop Grigentius as adviser, set out to improve the administration in Yemen. His first task was to introduce law. This task he entrusted to Grigentius, the bishop, ordained by the Patriarch of Alexandria,⁶ most probably at the request of the Ethiopian Emperor. The Laws which Grigentius drew up in the name of Abreha are preserved.⁷ Since they were prepared by an ecclesiastic, it is not surprising that the entire body of legislation had a distinctly moralistic character. For example, sex offences occupy a disproportionate part of the code. Fornication was punished by 100 stripes, the amputation of the left ear and confiscation of property. In the case of a woman, her left breast was cut off. Similar but rather more severe penalties were inflicted on adulterers. Procurers were liable to amputation of the tongue. Public singers,

5. Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sassaniden* (Leyden, 1873), pp. 194-197.

6. J.B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, (London, 1923), vol. II, p. 327 n. 1.

7. *Ibid.*

harp-players, actors and dancers were all suppressed, and anyone found practising these arts was punished by whipping and a year's hard labour. To be burned alive was the fate of a sorcerer. Severe penalties were also imposed for failing to inform the public authorities of a neighbour's misconduct. Cruel punishments were meted out to women who ventured to deride men. One curious provision regards early marriages: parents who did not arrange for the future marriage of their children when they were between the ages of ten and twelve, were liable to a fine. Whether this law was ever enforced in South Arabia is a moot point.⁸

The second task that Abreha undertook was the expansion of his territory. He conquered tribes living in the northern part of his kingdom. According to his inscription he was "king of Saba and Dhū Raydan and Hadramawt and Yamanāt and of the Arabs on the plateau and in Tihamat".⁹ Abreha extended his occupation in South Arabia both eastwards and northwards. The Hadramawt had not been mentioned before as being occupied by Ethiopians. Here also are mentioned the Bedouin Arabs, who chiefly inhabited the region of Al-Hijaz.

The purpose of Abreha's conquest was not merely to expand his territory, but also to open trade routes to the north and gain control of the spice trade in Arabia. He achieved his aim and Ethiopians were now settled in different centres to control the spice trade. The land route began from San'a, Abreha's capital city, and went north through the main towns of Arabia such as Al-Taif, Mecca and Yathrib, until it reached Damascus.¹⁰ It was the only highway which connected Arabia with the outside world and the control of this route had vital significance for the economic life of South Arabia.

Abreha shifted his capital city from Zafar to San'a, the new capital city north of Zafar. We do not know what inspired Abreha to move his capital city further to the north, but most probably it was for some cogent economic reason. As a matter of fact the site of San'a existed a long time before Abreha and I think it would not be possible to attribute the foundation of the town to him.¹¹ The similarity of the name San'a to the Ethiopic word $\pi\pi\alpha$ could be perhaps a mere coincidence. Parallel to that, he paid special attention to Marib where the famous dam existed. There, he had a residential palace and a church. It was also there that he received representatives of different countries.

During his reign he also repaired the great dam of Marib which had burst, due to flood, one year prior to the beginning of his reign. This dam was of vital importance to South Arabian trade, agriculture and prosperity and in general, to national well-being. The dam was originally built in the early *Mukarrib* of South Arabia, perhaps even before 750 B.C. The purpose of the construction of this great dam was to acquire water for drinking and irrigation. Occasionally it suffered damage, but it was always repaired. The last and the final mishap occurred after the reign of Abreha. If we judge from the provisions which he made for the workers—some 5,806 sacks of flour and 26,000 packages of dates, 3,000

8. *Ibid.*, (the authenticity of the book has not yet been established).

9. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 437; J. Ryckmans, *L'institution monarchique*, p. 243; G. B. Philby, *The Background of Islam*, (Alexandria, 1947), p. 122.

10. See sketch map. P. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, (London, 1964), p. 63.

11. H. Von Wissmann, and M. Hoeffner, *Beiträge zur historischen Geographie des vorislamischen Südarabien*, p. 19.

12. F. Albright states: "I have no hesitation in dating the origins of the dam at the beginning of the MKRB period, i.e., c. 750 B.C. and it is reasonable to believe that it may have even antedated this. *Archaeological Discoveries in South Arabia*, (Baltimore, 1958), p. 75; A. Fakhry, *An Archaeological Journey to Yemen*, p. 62; suggests the 7th century (c. 660-620 B.C.). According to him the king who had constructed this dam was Sumnu'alay Yanuf, son of Damar'alay, the Mukarrib of Saba p. 61.62.

oxen and 300 camels and 11,000 doves—it was really a huge project. The work was completed in fifty days.¹³

2. The Dam Inscription of 'Abreha¹⁴

(Face A, 1–8: CIH 1–8.) By the might and aid and mercy of the Merciful and of His Messiah and of the Holy Spirit. They have written this inscription: Behold 'Abraha who has been exalted, the king, the descendant of men of Ge'ez, the *ramaihis*, Za Bayman, king of Saba' and Dhu Raydan and Hadramawt and Yamanat and of 'their' Arabs on the plateau and in Tihamat.

(Face A, 9–24: CIH, 9–24.) Now they have written this inscription, stating that:—He subjected and recognized as ruler by decree Yazid b. Kabsat in their province, whom they accepted over Kiddat Wada'. He was established as deputy for him and was subject; and with him were the *qayl*-princes of Saba', the men of experience, 'shrn, Murrat and Tamimat and Hanis and Martad and Hanif Dhu Khalil, and the men of Za'an, *qayl*-princes, Ma'adi-karib b. Sumu-yafa' and Ha'an and their 'brethren' bany' Aslam. And further, that:—They sent in peace Garrah Dhu ZBNR, that he might be supreme in the east. And the garrisons of Kidar killed him and plundered. And Yazid collected those put under his command *dhi'hw*, from Kiddat, and made war on Hadramawt, and seized Mazin, the runaway, the descendant of men of the Dammar sept, and returned to 'Abran.

(Face A, 24–Face B, 18: CIH 24–46.) Then the report reached them, and the Habasat and Himyar called up and collected their armies by thousands in the month Dhu Qayzan of 657. And the generals of Saba' set out and penetrated from Sirwah to Nabat in 'Abran. And when they reached Nabat, Kidar had appointed their battle force (to posts). And Himyar delayed and collected information, and their commanders were Watih and 'Awdah, both Dhu Gadan. Then Yazid reached them, in Nabat, and held back his hand from them (the enemy) before appointing the battle force. And then, *wk*, a report reached them concerning Saba', that the ramp and the dyke and the catchment basin and the frontal work were broken in the month Dhu Madraan of (year) 7.

(Face B, 18–27: CIH 46–55.) Then after this mandate reached them, the runners presented a covenant which the Arab (collective), sept of Wada', who were under orders with Yazid, judged good, (to the effect) that all of them should hold their hands back, and give them pledges by the runner, and as to the battle force Kidar had appointed, the *qayl*-princes should join (it) to those who were subject.

(Face B, 27–Face C, 4: CIH 55–63.) And the king appointed a time incumbent on the tribes (for the return) to ditches and plastering and cut terraces and *bar'a*-land and pitch-pit, *dftm*, and workmen's shops, *nhmt*, and mud-bank, *sayhurim*, for to repair the ramp and the dyke and the breaches that were in Marib, and imposed a promise on them, in the month Dhu Sarban of (year) 7.

13. F. Albright, *Archaeological Discoveries*, p. 74. In spite of this fact, Nabih Amin Faris "blames" the Ethiopians for the alleged neglect of the antiquities of Southern Arabia. He says "they made no effort to preserve any of the remains of the already tottering structure". (*The Antiquities of South Arabia*, (Princeton, 1928), p. 2).

14. F. Praetorius, "Bemerkungen zu den beiden grossen Inschriften vom Dammbbruch zu Marib": *ZDMG*, 53 (1899), pp. 1–24; E. Glaser, "Zwei Inschriften über den Dammbbruch von Mareb": *Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatischen Gesellschaft*, 6 (1897), pp. 360–488; A. Wiedemann has further elaborated and clarified the text in *Orientalische Literatur-Zeitung*, 1 (1898) cols. 19–26; A. Fakhry, *An Archaeological Journey to Yemen*, pp. 79–83 (text).

(Face C, 4–16: CIH 63–75.) Now after they had appointed the time and the Arab judged (it) good, they made for the city Marib, and they prayed at the church *b't*, of Marib, for therein (in the city) were a priest, father of a mission (?) and a 'son'. They lifted the ramp away and dug till they reached the rent, and at a point above the rent, to base the dyke. And when they had let (the water) flow away in order to base the dyke, there was anxiety and care for the tribes and the city. And all who saw how this anxiety had come nigh upon the tribes made praises heard for them, *'dnw lhmw*, for the *'ahabis* of (among) them and the Himyarit of (among) them.

(Face C, 17–21: CIH 76–80.) And after that they had made praises heard for the tribes, the *qayl*-princes who had fortified themselves in Kidar went down again when they reached the king with the battle force which they had appointed to join them, then the king and his son held back their hands (from war with them).

(Face C, 21–28: CIH 80–87.) The king decreed, *gb'*, in the city Marib: 'The builder of the ramp and the *qayl*-princes who were there are *illustrissimi*'. Then he brought before him their 'sons': Aksum Dhu Ma'afir, the king's son, and Magazzaf Dhu DRNH, and 'Adug Dhu Fayis, and SYWLMN, and Dhu Sa'banai Dhu Ru'ain and Dhu Hamdan and Dhu Kula'an and Dhu Mahadd and others (entitled) Dhu, and a strong one, *'lsm*, Dhu Yaz'an and Dhu Dubyan and the *kabir*-officers of Hadramawt and of *qrnt*.

(Face C, 28–33: CIH 87–92.) And it was then, *wk*, that there reached them the embassy of the nagasi, and there reached them an embassy of the Roman king and a delegation, *tnblt*, of the king of Fars, and an envoy, *rsl*, of Muddiran (Mundir), and an envoy of Harit b. Gabalat, and an envoy of 'Abi-karib b. Gabala.

(Face C, 33–Face D, 3: CIH 92–101.) And then after those who wished had prayed in praise of the Merciful, the tribes went according to the previous (fixed) tin that he (the king) should call them up, according to their promise for later. And when the tribes arrived at the term of the later Dhu Da'awn, and when they set them, the tribes, to their duties, *k'sywhmw 'sbn brhmw*, they repaired what was broken from the dyke, about which Ya'fur had given orders, *tqh*, obligatory for Saba' and the *qayl*-princes who were *'mtnkn*. And he gave them instruction.

(Face D, 4–15: CIH 102–114.) [Describes the repair of a measured section of the dyke, the ditching to reconstruct the ramp and its plaster facing, and the improvement of the area irrigated from the catchment basin so that the outflow could run straight on, *lyr'qdmn*, with two channels from the point of divergence.

(Face D, 15–27: CIH 114–137.) And so they completed the work within the period for which they were under obligation at their sections, *bn ywmn dbhw yq' lgzwhmw*. And Yada'-il and a butcher gave a blessing at the church and the dyke and the ramp over 5,806 of flour and 26,000 of dates of the *bqnt* kind. There were 3,000 slaughtered beasts, both cows and small cattle, and 300 camels, fast and darkish and with cut ears (she-camels) and 11,000 turtle doves, *'ghlb*, ... And they perfected their building work on the 58th day (that they were responsible for their section) in the 11th hour, in the month Dhu Ma'an of 658."

Abreha decided to repair the dam in order to maintain the balance of economic life in South Arabia. He went in person to Marib, and the dam was repaired in his presence. At the same time, he ordered the ruins of the castle of Bilkis to be transported to San'a because he had in mind to build a church there. In commemoration of the event, he left a Sabaeen inscription of 136 lines on a rectangular column. Such a long inscription has

not, so far, been discovered elsewhere in South Arabia. The inscription speaks not only about the repairs to the dam, but also about the cultural, political, commercial and religious activities of Abreha inside and outside his domain.

Later, the final destruction of the dam took place.¹⁵ This event, alluded to in the Koran,¹⁶ was the main cause of the decline and decay of South Arabia in general. It brought poverty which induced the inhabitants to take refuge elsewhere.¹⁷ Perhaps the few lines of a lyric by A'sha better depict the consequences of the burst dam:

All hopes of succour from distress are gone,
The Ma'rib Dam by the flood was burst;
Of marble stone Himyar this dam had built,
To store the water for the time of thirst.
Thence to every field and every vineyard,
At fixed hours the water they disperst.¹⁸

Abreha realized that the Ethiopian occupation of South Arabia could be stabilized through economic prosperity and religious affiliation. For this purpose, he conceived a new project designed to achieve both ends. That was to build a great church at San'a, which would be the religious as well as the economic centre of the Arabian peninsula. He knew that the Quraish of Mecca became rich because they were protectors of the shrine of Mecca and all the gifts of the pilgrims became their personal property; for pilgrimage was a source of great revenue to those who dwelt in a city to which pilgrims travelled or else beside roads leading thither.¹⁹ It was for this reason that he planned to build the church at San'a. At the same time, he felt he was rendering a great service to the Christian faith by converting the inhabitants of the peninsula. For this purpose, Bishop Grigentius consecrated many priests and deacons and advised Abreha to take appropriate measures against the pagans and Jews as well, to induce them to accept the Christian religion.

As Abreha was the viceroy of the Aksumite Emperor, he first obtained the Emperor's approval before proceeding with his plan and then started to build the church which is known by the Arabs as *al-Qalis* or *al-Qulays*, from the Greek Ἐκκλησία.²⁰

The church was much admired by Arab writers. They claimed that its like was not to be found anywhere in the world at that time.²¹ Indeed it was the largest church ever built in that area, and it was constructed from the ruins of the castle Qasr al-Bilkis of Marib.²² Abreha most probably employed Greek architects and technicians because the descriptions of the church give the impression that it was in the style of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople.

"In design the church was Basilican. Lofty columns of precious marble divided the nave from the aisles. The spaces above the columns, the apse and

the upper part of the walls, were adorned with magnificent mosaics in gold and colours, or embellished with paintings. The lower part of the walls was panelled, and the floor was paved with marble of many hues set in tasteful harmony. The choir was divided off by an ebony screen inlaid with ivory most beautifully carved, and gold and silver ornament was lavished all over the interior. The doors were overlaid with plates of gold studded with silver nails, and plates of silver studded with massive nails of gold; while the doors leading to the three altars were wrought with large panels of gold set with precious stones. On every panel there stood in relief a jewelled cross of gold with a red jacinth in gold, and round about the cross were flowers of open-work in gold with gems or enamel of many colours."²³

3. Abreha's Expedition to Mecca

After completing the church, Abreha hoped to divert pilgrimages from Mecca to San'a. Toward this end, he issued a decree that the Arabs living in his kingdom must pay a visit to San'a. At the same time, he sent envoys to other regions of Arabia which were not under his control to propagate support for the new shrine. A certain Arab from Hijaz, from the tribe of Banu Fugaym Harith ben Malik, one of those who arranged the calendar, learned of Abreha's mission. He then went to the church and defiled it.²⁴ When Abreha heard that this outrage had been committed by one of the people of the temple of Mecca to show his scorn and contempt for the new shrine, he was filled with wrath and swore that he would march against Mecca and lay the temple in ruins. He ordered his soldiers to prepare for this expedition and it seems that he took some elephants with him.²⁵ For this reason, the event is associated in literary sources with the year 570 A.D. which is called *am al-fil*, the Year of the Elephant. On the way, he tried to subdue some tribes who were not already under his control.

According to some Arab sources, Abreha led about 60,000 soldiers against Mecca. The purpose of this expedition was to destroy the Ka'ba, the holy stone of Mecca, supposed to have been sent from God through the angel, Gabriel. Dhu Nafr Al-Himyar, one of the princes of an ancient tribe of Yemen, collected his army and those of other Arabs to prevent the march of Abreha. The attempt of Nafr failed, and following his defeat, he was taken to Abreha as prisoner. His life was spared and he accompanied Abreha under heavy guard. Abreha continued his march to the north and arrived in central Yemen, in the area known as Khatham. Nufayl, the leader of that tribe, gathered warriors from other tribes also in the hope of impeding the progress of Abreha and saving the Ka'ba from destruction. Again the Ethiopians were victorious and Nufayl was captured and condemned to death. But in order to escape death, Nufayl offered to serve as Abreha's guide and the offer was accepted. When other leaders saw the power of Abreha, they submitted to him and he marched towards Mecca without interference. He camped in Muḡhammis, a place located a little beyond Mecca. Before he started to march against the city, he sent his cavalry under the leadership of Al-Aswad ibn Maqsud to raid the area around Mecca. This attack resulted in heavy losses for the inhabitants of that region,

15. Ahmad Fakhry, *An Archaeological Journey*, p. 62; F. Albright, *Archaeological Discoveries*, p. 75.

16. Surah 34:45.

17. Ahmad Fakhry, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

18. Nabin Amin Faris, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

19. P. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, (London, 1964), p. 99.

20. It is interesting to note here that Abreha employed a Semitic term, *bet*, for the church he built in Marib. J. Ryckmans, "Le Christianisme en Arabie du Sud préislamique", *L'Orient cristiano nella storia della civiltà: Atti del Convegno internazionale sul Tema, Accademia dei Lincei*, no. 62 (Roma, 1964), p. 420; A. Fakhry, *An Archaeological Journey*, p. 76.

21. Th. Nöldeke, *op. cit.*, p. 201; L. Caetani, *Annali dell' Islam*, (Milano, 1905), vol. I, p. 143; R.A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, (London, 1907), p. 28.

22. L. Caetani, *Annali*, vol. I, p. 143.

23. A. Butler, *The Arab Conquest*, pp. 147-148. Most probably some remains of this church have been incorporated in the present great Mosque, Jami al Kabir, at San'a. H. Scott, *In the High Yemen*, (London, 1947), pp. 128-212; L. Caetani, *Annali*, vol. I, p. 143.

24. L. Caetani, *Annali*, vol. I, p. 145.

L. Caetani says that there were 14 elephants in this expedition and the most famous among them was Mahmud. (*Annali*, vol. I, p. 145).

25. The late Arab artists presented in their painting many elephants which were used by Abreha in this expedition, E. Esin, *Mecca the blessed and Medinah the radiant*, (London, 1963), p. 50, ill. 21 and 24.

in particular the Quraish. Abdul Al-Muttalib, grandfather of Mohammad, lost about 200 camels in this raid. The cavalry brought back all the booty to the camp of Abreha. From this raid, the Quraish realized the number and potential of the Ethiopians, and they abandoned the idea of resisting. They decided instead to leave the Ka'ba under God's protection.²⁶

Abreha sent a messenger to the people of Mecca saying to them: "I have not come to wage war on you, but only to destroy the Temple. Unless you take up arms, in its defense, I have no wish to shed your blood". Abdu al-Muttalib replied: "By God, we seek not war, for which we are unable. This is God's holy House, and the house of Abraham, His friend; it is for Him to protect His house and Sanctuary; if He abandons it, we cannot defend it".²⁷ Then Abdu al-Muttalib was led by the envoy to the Ethiopian camp and stood before the king. Abreha asked him what he wanted. Abdu al-Muttalib replied: "I want the king to restore to me 200 camels of mine which he has taken away". Abreha said to the interpreter: "Tell him: You pleased me when I first saw you, but now that you have spoken to me, I hold you cheap. What do you speak to me of 200 camels which I have taken and omit to speak about the temple venerated by you and your fathers which I have come to destroy?". Then said Abdu al-Muttalib: "The camels are mine, but the temple belongs to another, who will defend it". When Abreha exclaimed "He cannot defend it from me", he replied: "That is your affair; only give me back my camels". Having recovered his camels, Abdu al-Muttalib returned to Quraish. The inhabitants then sent a delegation to Abreha, of whom Abdu al-Muttalib was one, offering to surrender a third part of their possessions to Abreha on condition that he should spare the temple, but he refused.²⁸

According to traditional history, we are told that "next morning, when Abreha prepared to enter Mecca, his elephant knelt down and would not budge, though they beat its head with an axe and thrust sharp stakes into its flanks; but when they turned it in the direction of Yemen, it rose up and trotted away with alacrity. Then God sent from the sea a flock of birds, like swallows, every one of which carried three stones as large as chick-peas or lentils, one in its bill and one in each claw and they dropped these stones on Abreha's soldiers. All who were struck by these stones perished."²⁹ Another version says: "Whenever a man was struck, sores and pustules broke out on that part of his body".³⁰ In other words, smallpox broke out in Abreha's army. "Here we encounter the historical fact of an outbreak of pestilence in the Abyssinian army."³¹ "The rest fled in disorder, dropping down as they ran or wherever they stopped to quench their thirst." Abreha himself "was smitten with a plague so that his limbs rotted piecemeal."³² An Arab writer says: "Abreha they smote, though the world thought he was secure, free of all dangers in his great Mawkal palace."³³

The Arab writers connect this expedition with the birth of Mohammed in 570 A.D. (known as the Year of the Elephant). But after the death of Abreha, South Arabia was still ruled by his son Yaksum who was succeeded by his half-brother, Masruk.³⁴ The Ethio-

pian occupation in South Arabia is considered by some scholars to have ended in 575 A.D. However, other writers believe that this expedition took place 23 years before the birth of Mohammed and this seems more probable.³⁵

After his unsuccessful expedition to Mecca, Abreha continued to rule South Arabia for some few years. Generally he "was a wise man, learned, loving God and doing good in his life, honoured by all kings without enemies who feared him, on account of the goodness of his life".³⁶

There is another Arab legend in connection with Abreha's expedition to the north. "The grandson of Abreha, Aksum b. al Sabbah al Himyari, the son of his daughter, went to Mecca to perform a pilgrimage. On his way back from Mecca, he stayed in the church in Nagrah. He was attacked by men from Mecca who robbed him of his belongings and looted the church. Aksum went to his grandfather and complained about the behaviour of the men from Mecca. Abreha vowed to destroy the sanctuary of Mecca."³⁷ That Abreha undertook an expedition to the north is a fact attested to by inscription:

By the might of the Merciful and his Messiah: the king, 'Abreha Za Yahman, king of Saba' and Dhu Raydan and Hadramawt and Yamanat and of 'their' Arabs on the plateau and in Tihamat. They have written this document, stating that they raided Ma'add in the raid in springtime, in the month of Dhu Tabtan. Further, that they subjected all the Bany 'Amir. Now the king appointed 'Abi-gabar to the battle force with Kiddat Wa'il, and Basir b. Husan with Sa'd. And they fought and battled at the head of the army, Kiddat against Bany 'Amir, Murad and Sa'd against Wad ... (and) Murran, in a wadi on the route to Turaban. And everyone who applied himself and fought for the king in Haliban slew and took prisoners. And as Ma'add continued (in retreat) they drew closer, *dnw kzi m'dm*, and took hostages. And thereafter 'Amr b. Muddir gave much and pledged for them (the hostages) from him (the king), and accepted his rule over Ma'add. And they returned from Ma'add. By the might of the Merciful. Its month of ... in year 662.³⁸ (The Sabaeen era 662 may be equivalent to 543 of our era).³⁹

4. The Fate of the Ethiopian Occupation in South Arabia

Abreha had two sons, Yaksum and Masruk, from Rainhaba, the wife of D Yazan, a Yemenite noble. The former is mentioned in the dam inscription.⁴⁰ After death, Yaksum succeeded him on the throne in South Arabia. The relations between Yaksum and the ruler of Aksum seemed to have been good. He continued the policy of his father and paid tribute to the Emperor. But his relations with the South Arabians deteriorated. Yaksum lacked his father's prestige and was unable to improve

26. L. Caetani, *Annali dell' Islam*, vol. I, pp. 143-147.

27. R.A. Nicolson, *A Literary History*, p. 66.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*

32. R.A. Nicolson, *op. cit.*, p. 68; Th. Nöldeke, *op. cit.*, p. 205 ff.; L. Caetani, *op. cit.*, p. 120, n.1.

33. Nabih Amin Faris, *op. cit.*, p. 56. This is the first appearance of smallpox; see P. Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

34. According to Sidney Smith, Yaksum ruled for 2 years and Masruk for 3 years, and in this way Ethiopian sovereignty in South Arabia ended in 575 A.D. (*op. cit.*, p. 434).

35. M.J. Kister, "The Campaign of Huluban, A New Light on the Expedition of Abreha": *Muséon* (1965), p. 427.

36. Abu Salih, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Neighbouring Countries*, trans. B.T.A. Evliya (Oxford, 1895), p. 301. This statement is based on Tabari.

37. M.J. Kister, "The Campaign of Huluban. A New Light on the Expedition of Abreha": *Muséon* (1965), p. 431.

38. S. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 435; M. Kister, *op. cit.*, p. 425.

39. N. Pigulevskaja, "Les rapports sociaux à Nedjran": *JESHO*, 3 (1960), p. 130.

40. Line 82.

discipline in the army. The army, therefore, grew lax. Oppression and lawlessness increased, but the Arabs tolerated the ineffectual administration of Yaksum because of the respect they had held for his father. Economically, the country was prosperous. The land routes and sea ports were busy. Inland trade flourished during that time and many young Yemenites were even taken by force to be used as interpreters for commercial purposes. According to some Arab writers, Yaksum ruled for nineteen years and was succeeded by his brother, Masruk.

Masruk was even less effective as ruler of South Arabia. The inhabitants suffered severe oppression during his reign. The administration finally became so bad that the inhabitants could tolerate it no longer, but from a military point of view, the South Arabians were inferior to the Ethiopians, and could not therefore rise against them. According to some sources, Sayf b. Dhu Yazan the maternal half-brother of Masruk and Yaksum, who was also a descendant of the royal house of South Arabia, resolved to seek foreign intervention. His choice lay between the Byzantine and Persian Empires, and he first betook himself to Constantinople. The Emperor of Byzantium could not favour the request of Sayf since he shared a 'common' belief with the Ethiopian Christians in South Arabia. Disappointed by the attitude of the Emperor, he went to the Arab King of Hiram, Nu'man b. Mudhir, who was under Persian suzerainty in the hope of being presented to the Persian monarch, Nushirwan, surnamed 'the Just'. Sayf stayed one year in Hiram until the Arab vassal king went to Ctesiphon, the capital city of Nushirwan. After a stay of some days in Ctesiphon, Sayf succeeded in obtaining an audience through the Arab king of Hiram. He prostrated himself before the gorgeously attired Emperor, Nushirwan, and then started to explain the purpose of his coming. 'O King,' he said, 'the Ravens have taken our land'. 'Which Ravens?' inquired Nushirwan, 'those of Abyssinia or those of India?' 'Abyssinians', continued Sayf, 'and now I come to thee that you may'st help me and drive them away from me; then shall the lordship over my land be thine, for you are preferred by us to them'. 'Thy land', answered the king, 'is too remote from ours, and is withal too poor a land wherein is nought but sheep and camels for us to desire it. I cannot venture a Persian army in Arabia, nor have I any wish so to do'.⁴¹

"So Nushirwan gave him a present of 10,000 dirhams and a robe of honour, and so dismissed him. But the Himyarite envoy, as he went forth from the palace, cast the gold in handfuls amongst the retainers, slaves, pages and hand maidens who stood and these greedily scrambled for it. When the king heard this, he recalled the envoy, and asked him how he dared deal thus with the king's gift. 'What else should I do with it?' answered he. 'The mountains of my land whence I come consist only of gold and silver'. And when the king heard this, he swallowed the bait so artfully presented, and detained the envoy till he should lay the matter before his advisors. Then said one of his counsellors, 'O King, in thy prisons are men whom thou cast into fetters to put them to death; cannot thou give him these? If they perish, then is thy purpose fulfilled; but if they take the country, then is thy lordship increased'.⁴²

This ingenious plan for combining imperial expansion with domestic economy was enthusiastically approved, and an examination of the prisons produced 800 condemned felons who were forthwith placed under the command of a super-annuated general

41. E. Browne, *op. cit.*, 179.

42. *Ibid.*

named Wahriz,⁴³ who had been a famous archer in his youth but was now so old that, as the story runs, his eyelids drooped over his eyes and he had to be supported on both sides when he wished to draw his bow. The expeditionary force thus constituted and accompanied by Sayf embarked on eight ships, two of which were wrecked, while the remaining six safely reached the coast of Hadramawt, where the little Persian army of 800 men was largely reinforced by the Yemenite Arabs.

The news of this bold invasion soon reached Masruk and brought him out at the head of his hosts to give battle. Then Wahriz made a great feast for his followers, and while they were carousing, he burned his ships and destroyed his stores, after which in a spirited harangue, he announced to the army, 'I burned the ships because I wanted you never to return to your fatherland; I burned your clothes because I thought that in case of defeat, they might not be taken by Abyssinians; your provisions I threw in the sea because I do not want even a single one of you to have food for a single day. Be men to struggle and die with me'. Actually there was little option in the matter, so all of them agreed to enter into combat with him and the battle was joined. In addition to the Ethiopians, Masruk collected a good number of soldiers from his tributary tribes and came with 100,000 men against Wahriz.⁴⁴ It is said that, at the same time, Wahriz ordered his eyelids to be raised to his forehead and he made those who stood by him point out the Ethiopian king who was made more conspicuous by an immense ruby, the size of an egg, which shone on his forehead. Choosing an appropriate moment, Wahriz shot an arrow at him as he rode by on his mule and the arrow struck fair in the middle of the ruby, splintering it into pieces and transfixing Masruk's forehead. The death of the Ethiopian king was the signal for the rout of the Ethiopians, whom the victorious Persians massacred without mercy, though sparing their Arab and Himyarite allies. In the camp of the Ethiopians, countless booty fell into the hands of the Persians'.⁴⁵

The importance of this victory is underlined by Mohammad b. al-Hasan b. Isfandiyyar, who says, "this is one of the two shots in which the Persians glory, the other being the shot..... in the reign of Kisra (Anushirwan) Wahriz who slew the King of the Abyssinians".⁴⁶ This version of the story, based on Tabari, gives the impression that the whole affair involved an act of ambush which demoralized the Ethiopian army as their commander and King was killed first.

The result of this expedition inspired the poets to praise the victory:

43. When Saif, the son of Dhu Yazan, saw the strength of the expeditionary force, "what can avail these few against the many Abyssinians?" said he. And the king said: "A little fire is enough to burn a great deal of firewood". In fact the oriental sources are not unanimous about the number of the army. Tabari puts it at 800 men, Hamza raises it to 809, and others like Nihayatu'l Irab to 3,600. However, as far as the itinerary of the expedition is concerned they agree. The opening stages were at sea: they disembarked at the coast of Hadramawt and then they marched till they encountered the army of Masruk. (Al-Tha'libi, *Histoire des rois des Perses*, trans. Zotenberg, (Paris, 1900), pp. 616-618; Hadi Hasan, *A History of Persian Navigation*, (London, 1928), p. 72 ff.) Some Persian writers mention that the Persian expeditionary force landed first at Mayoon, the present Perim, an island in the mouth of Bab al-Mandab. The fact inspired some poets to compose verses which run as follows: "At Mayoon a thousand warriors landed armed with shields.

They were of the race of Sassan and Mahrejan;

They came to expel the blacks from Yemen,

Guided by a Prince of the race of Shoo [Dhu] Jadan." As quoted by L. Farago, *Arabian Antic*, (New York, 1938), p. 252.

44. Maçoudi, *Les prairies d'or*, p. 165.

45. E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, (London, 1902), vol. I, pp. 179-180; Th. Nöldeke, *op. cit.*, pp. 229-234.

46. *An Abridged Translation of the History of Tabaristan, compiled about A. H. 613 (A.D. 1216) by Mohammad b. al-Hasan b. Isfandiyyar*, trans. E.G. Browne (London, 1905), p. 20.

Avec une armée de héros de la race de Sassan,
héros aux regards superbes, qui faisaient au harem
un rempart de leurs lances,
Et de leurs épées acérées et brillantes, qui
pénétraient dans le corps, rapides comme l'éclair,
Nous avons tué l'orgueilleux Masruk, tandis que les
tribus Abyssines nous provoquaient au combat,
Le rubis qui brillait sur son front a été fendu par
la flèche du guerrier de Sassan.
Alors notre armée victorieuse a enveloppé le pays de
Khatân, elle a pénétré jusque sous les portiques de Goumdân.
Là nous avons goûté toutes les voluptés et comblé de nos bien faits les fils de
Khatân.⁴⁷

After the defeat of the Ethiopians on the battlefield, Wahriz continued his march inland and killed the Ethiopians whom he met on the way. He thus took over power in Yemen, whereafter he sent a rich booty to the Emperor Nushirwan and asked for instructions about the future administration of the conquered territory. Nushirwan told him to assign an annual tribute which the Yemenites would have to pay to the Persian King, and that he himself should return to Persia after he had entrusted the administration to Sayf. Thus South Arabia became a territory of Persia, under the administration of a local prince. Soon after the return of Wahriz, Sayf began to massacre the Ethiopians. Only the lives of a few youths were spared. They became slaves in the service of Sayf and formed his bodyguard, preceding him wherever he went, bearing lances. With the exception of one feeble old man, the Ethiopians were all so young that they could hardly bear arms. As time passed, Sayf grew to have complete trust in his bodyguard, who were with him night and day. One day, Sayf went out of his palace of Gumdân, in Sa'na, with his youthful bodyguard to hunt. After the hunt, he rode off alone leaving his entourage behind and accompanied only by the Ethiopians. When they reached a lonely spot, the bodyguard surrounded him and stabbed and killed him. The only elderly man among them was automatically acclaimed as Governor of Yemen, under the name of Abreha II, and he set out to avenge the spilled blood of his kinsmen in Sa'na and other places. But this restoration of Ethiopian rule was ephemeral. When the Persian Emperor heard of it, he immediately dispatched Wahriz with 4,000 men to Yemen and gave him strict orders that he should not spare the life of a single Ethiopian.⁴⁸ All without exception, the old, young, women and children should be killed. Not only those, but also half-caste Arabs were condemned to death.⁴⁹ The orders of Nushirwan were fulfilled to the letter by Wahriz; he did not spare the lives of any Ethiopians and massacred even the half-caste indiscriminately. When the sovereign was informed of this, he made Wahriz ruler of Yemen. In view of these events, a good number of Ethiopians fled to the north, especially to the area around Mecca, where they began to play an important role in the social, economic, military and domestic life.⁵⁰

At the same time, the death of Sayf caused great distress among the inhabitants of Yemen, and they did not want to propose any more princes as vassal rulers of Persia.

47. Maçoudi, *Les prairies d'or*, p. 167.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 172-176; Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, pp. 236-237.

49. The fact may be supported by epigraphical evidence. In Aden a Sabaeen inscription was found which reads: "We assailed with cries of hatred and rage the Abyssinians and Berbers we rode forth together wrathfully, against this refuse of mankind". (C. Forster, *The Historical Geography of Arabia*, vol. II, p. 399.) The author maintains that this inscription referred to this event.

50. H. Lammens, *L'Arabie occidentale avant l'Hégire*, (Beyrouth, 1928), p. 17.

Wahriz then began to administer Yemen, paying annual tribute to the Persian king until his death. Marzaban, the son of Wahriz, succeeded him and governed the country also until his death. Binegan, his son then became ruler of Yemen; Binegan was succeeded in turn by his son, Chore Chosran. Finally the Emperor of Persia sent Badhan to rule Yemen until the rise of Islam.⁵¹

In fact the underlying reasons for the Persian invasion of Yemen were of far greater political significance than depicted by the Arab and Persian chroniclers. In the dam inscription of Abreha, it is mentioned explicitly that he was vassal king of the Aksumite Emperor and that at the same time he received at Marib the envoys of Rome, the delegation of Persia, envoys of Muddiran (al Mundir), of Harit b. Gabalat and of Abi-karib b. Gabalat. The coming of so many representatives implies a hope of certain political gain from Abreha. The Romans, as already mentioned, sent two delegations one after the other, both to Aksum and Sa'na to conclude a treaty of alliance "by reason of their common faith",⁵² with a view to suppressing Persia, their arch enemy, both militarily and economically. The appearance of envoys of Persia and the Arab tribes can be attributed to a desire to seek peace and friendship. How far they succeeded we do not know, but the fact is that Abreha stood for the cause of Byzantium. He attacked Mundir's territory "in response to several requests of Justinian".⁵³ This, of course, was a rebuff to the friendly gesture made by the Persian monarch and relations between the two states subsequently worsened. But Khusrau I could not intervene because he was occupied by a military conflict with Byzantium. Once peace had been restored and friendship had been cultivated between himself and Justin II of Byzantium, he started to plan the annexation of South Arabia, which had tremendous strategic and economic significance. Apart from the peace treaty which was concluded between Persia and Byzantium, Khusrau I became a personal friend of Justin II.⁵⁴ This helped him to carry out his plan with ease and exactitude; and so he succeeded in cutting off both Byzantium and Aksum from the Arabian Peninsula. The fact is clearly known to the Byzantine writers. Theophanes mentions explicitly the situation in South Arabia and says that the emperor of Byzantium avoided any direct involvement in the affair of South Arabia due to the friendship between the two big powers at that time.⁵⁵

Nothing is said about the intervention of or resistance by the Aksumite force in South Arabia. Perhaps this may be due to the absence of sources and not of action, because at that time they still had the required resources and man-power. In this case, it is logically possible that the revolt of Abreha II was supported by auxiliaries of the Aksumite forces. The loss of her overseas territory dealt a hard blow to the prestige of Aksum. She ceased to be considered as the third big power of that time, a position she had enjoyed since the third century of our era. In the meantime, as far as is known, the Byzantine Empire broke off all ties with the Aksumite Empire. From this time onwards, the Byzantine sources do not supply us with any kind of information concerning political, economic or cultural links.

The Ethiopian occupation in South Arabia left unhappy memories in the minds of the inhabitants and the Persian occupation was considered preferable. The following verse illustrates this better. "It is said", says Ishaq "that on the rock in the Yemen there

51. Nöldeke, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

52. Procopius, *op. cit.*, XX, 9, translation by Sidney Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 427.

53. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 447.

54. A. Vasiliév, "Justin I and Abyssinia", p. 68.

55. Theophanes, *Historia*, ed. B.G. Niebuhr: *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, Pars VI (Bonn, 1829) p. 485.

was an inscription dating from olden times":

To whom belongs the Kingdom of Dhimar?⁵⁶
 To Himyar the righteous.
 To whom belongs the Kingdom of Dhimar?
 To the evil Abyssinians.
 To whom belongs the Kingdom of Dhimar?
 To the free Persians.
 To whom belongs the Kingdom of Dhimar?
 To Quraysh the merchants.⁵⁷

56. 'Dhimar' means Yemen.

57. Ishaq, *The Life of Mohammad*, trans. A. Guillaume (Oxford, 1955), p. 34; Maçoudi, *Les prairies d'or*, vol. III, p. 178.

CHAPTER VII

THE SITUATION IN AKSUM AFTER THE REIGN OF CALEB

1. The Successors of Caleb

Both Ge'ez¹ and Greek² literary sources report that Caleb abdicated his throne voluntarily, without designating a successor, in order to enter the hermitage of *Abl Pentelêwon*, one of the leading personalities among the Nine Saints who came to Ethiopia from the Roman Empire towards the end of the 5th Century. Caleb's decision created serious problem regarding the succession.

a. The Sons

He had three sons, Gebre Meskal, Israel³ and Gebre Krestos. The first is mentioned in Ethiopian literary sources, while the latter two are attested to by numismatical and epigraphical evidence. We have coins of Israel bearing legends in both the Greek and Ge'ez languages. The third son, Gebre Krestos, appears only once in the imperial lists in the abbreviated form as Gebru.⁴ This is confirmed by two recently discovered Ge'ez inscriptions in Sabaeen characters. In the second one, which probably belonged to Gebre Krestos himself, the seventh line reads: "Man of Hadafen, Son of Ella Asbeha, Gebre Krestos". It would be premature, however, to conclude that this is the throne name of Gebre Meskal.⁵

b. Struggle for Power

According to the practice of the Imperial Ethiopian court, the eldest son succeeded his father. Which one of these three was the first-born son? The existing Ethiopian literary sources are contradictory on this point. One such source takes it for granted that Za-Israel was the eldest son of Caleb, and that, in this capacity, he followed his father to South Arabia to fight against Dhu Nuwas. After the conquest, his father Caleb appointed him Viceroy of Himyar, a position he occupied until the end of his father's

1. C. Conti Rossini, *Acta Yared et Pantalewon*: CSCO, *Scriptores Aethiopici* 17 (Paris, 1904); I. Guidi, "Il Gadla Aragawi": *RRAL*, Classe Sc. Mor. e Fil., *Atti* 2 (1896); M.A. Van den Oudenrijn, *La de Saint Za-Mikail Aragawi* (Paris, 1939); "Gedle Afse", unpublished MS., photocopy in the possession of the Institute of Ethiopian Archaeology.

2. Martyrium Arethae: *Acta Sanctorum*, Oct. vol. X, p. 721; Symeon Metaphrastes, *Migne PG.*, vol. CXV, col. 1289. In his *Homericorum Leges* Gregentius says that Caleb went to a mountain called Ophra after giving the power to his son, Atherphotham. See *Migne PG.*, vol. LXXXVI a, col. 57. So far this name cannot be traced in the lists of Ethiopian kings.

3. There are many variations of his name: Israel, Beto-Israel, Za-Israel, Zaba-Israel and Welde-Israel. See Sergey Hable-Selassie, "Preliminary report on my study trip to Aksum" (mimeographed, 1969), p. 4.

4. E. Littmann attempts to identify Gebre Meskal with Ella Asbeha: "Eine Goldmünze des Königs Israh von Aksum": *Zeitschrift fuer Numismatik*, 25 (1925), p. 273; while C. Conti Rossini questions whether it would be possible to identify Gebre Meskal with Israel. See *Storia d'Etiopia*, (Bergamo, 1928), p. 26.

reign. When he heard of his father's death and of the accession of his younger brother to the throne, he took his army and came to Ethiopia to regain his patrimony by force. The source, however, does not specify which of the two brothers was victorious, although it indicates that the struggle between them was long-sustained.⁶

Another source asserts that Gebre Meskal was the eldest son of Caleb and, as such, occupied a high administrative position in the southern part of the Aksumite dominion, apparently in the region of Shewa,⁷ until the abdication of his father. His younger brother, Bete Israel, took advantage of his brother's absence and seized the throne. When Gebre Meskal heard this news, he hastened to Aksum and found his brother on the throne. He asked who had given him permission to ascend the throne. Bete Israel replied: "I found the throne vacant and therefore ascended it for it is not right and proper for a woman to remain without a husband or a throne without a king". When Gebre Meskal heard this, he became furious and decided to wage war against his brother and then to occupy the throne by force. At this moment, the priests came with their Ark (*tabot*) and crosses and told Gebre Meskal to have patience until they could go and ask Emperor Caleb whom he wished to succeed him on the throne. Gebre Meskal accepted this proposal, calmed himself and said to them: "Go to him quickly and tell me the outcome soon". The priests went to Caleb and asked him to come out of his cell and designate his successor. He replied that he would neither leave his cell nor see people again. But he indicated that Gebre Meskal should succeed him and cursed Zaba—Israel because he had ascended the throne on his own initiative. When the priests came back and announced the decision of Caleb, Zaba-Israel immediately fell dead. Or according to another tradition, he went into hiding, taking with him the Ark (*tabot*) of St. Michael and the Chariot of the Ark of the Covenant and became the leader of the *Zar* cult.⁸ The internal struggle for power had serious effects. The South Arabian colonies lost their close links with Aksum. Abreha, the Aksumite Viceroy, revolted and proclaimed himself independent ruler of South Arabia, but his successors were unable to maintain their position for long and in due course the overseas territory fell under Persian sovereignty. No attempt was made to regain it as had been the case during the reign of Caleb.

In the hagiographical sources, Gebre-Meskal is considered to be Caleb's only son, and Bete-Israel is completely ignored. The consensus is that Gebre Meskal was Caleb's first-born son, and as such he became emperor before Caleb's departure to the hermitage of *Abba* Penteléwon.⁹

The Greek hagiographical sources, to a certain extent, disagree with the Ethiopian

6. List of Ethiopian Manuscripts collected by the Ethiopian Board for Antiquities, Tigre, File No. 84.

7. Oral tradition maintains that his seat was on the mountain of Managesha about 30 kms. west of Addis Ababa.

8. *ጸር* : *Zar*=possession by supernatural spirits; the spirits themselves or the cult connected with their worship. Some people consider *Zar* to be a unique Ethiopian phenomenon and the following note may strengthen this view. In another chronicle we find more details about the *Zar*: "Caleb had two sons, Gebre Meskal and Weld Israel. To Gebre Meskal he gave the visible Empire, while to Weld Israel he gave the invisible one. The sons of Weld Israel who ruled through occult powers were Werrer and Emamo. The sons of Werrer and Emamo were Joseph, Gebre Meskal, Birru, Bir Alengaw, Enqulal and Derra. There were 44 kings; and the chiefs were Tequar Was Entechi, Dem Kelebu, Esat Bafu and Tote. Immense was the number of their slaves. Those (kings) who embraced Islam were Abdel and Abdel-kadir and those who became Galla were Atete, Yitewora and Tulu. Those who became Amhara were Gragn, Tsenger, Lamle, Zigban, Mekes, etc. They received propitiatory sacrifices of sheep, goats and hens of a particular colour, red, white, etc.; otherwise they would lose their power". (Tekle Giorgis, *Chronicle of Ethiopia* MS., p. 11).

9. *Gedle Afse*, Photocopy of the Institute of Ethiopian Archaeology, p. 85; "Il Gadla Aragawi", p. 77; *Acta Yared*, p. 11, (text).



Gold coin of Bete Israel

Photo: Institute of Eth. Archaeolog.

ones. They mention also that Emperor Caleb, before his departure to join monastic life in the hermitage located on the mountain called Ophra, designated his son Atherphotham successor to the throne. The whole tone of this passage gives the impression that the change of power took place smoothly without any disturbance.

2. The Reigns of Israel and Gebre Meskal

a) Israel

It seems certain that Israel and Gebre Meskal acceded to the throne one after the other. In fact this practice is neither unusual nor illegal in Ethiopia. The question is: which of the two brothers ruled first? In some lists of imperial names, Israel appears before Gebre Meskal, which means that he ruled first,¹⁰ but the length of the reign ascribed to the former varies. In one list, he is indicated as having ruled for only one month,¹¹ while in the list published by Carlo Conti Rossini, his reign is given as eight months;¹² both lend weight to the tradition that he seized power by force for a short time. It has already been stated that hagiographical sources do not mention him at all; only the *Kibre Negest* mentions him as the son of Caleb.¹³ However, we do have his coins, found in various places in Ethiopia, particularly at Adulis.¹⁴ The very existence of coins suggests a longer reign than is indicated by the lists of the kings. The minting and circulation of coins demands many years. His coins bear a legend in Greek characters, slightly abbreviated in reverse:

Obverse: Is+ra+e+l+;

Reverse: Kin(g) of Aksumi(tes).

The image of the crowned head appears on the reverse, whereas the obverse shows the king's head uncrowned and bearing a cloth covering. On both sides of the coin, the head is flanked by wheat sheaves. The four crosses which are engraved between the letters of his name confirm his Christian faith.

Antonio Mordini¹⁵ has described one of Israel's coins which has the following legend in Ge'ez characters:

Obverse: (K)ing Yesrael;

Reverse: Mercy to the people.

The head of the king, crowned and uncrowned as in the previous example, appears on both sides but there is some doubt whether this coin really should be attributed to Israel. If it is compared with those bearing the legend in Greek, the latter are clearer and in much better condition. The coin bearing the legend in Ge'ez seems to belong to a later period when the standard of workmanship had deteriorated. Mordini himself dates this coin as of 7th century A.D.¹⁶

10. C. Conti Rossini, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

11. Unpublished list attached to *Bahre Hasab* of Debre Marqos in Gojjam. In another list attached at the end of "Gedle Abreha and Asbeha" in Aksum, the date of his reign is left blank.

12. C. Conti Rossini, "Les listes des rois d'Aksoum": *JA*, 10 (1909), p. 295 (37).

13. W. Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelik*, (London, 1928), p. 226; *DAE*, vol. I, p. 54; F. Anfray, "Les rois d'Aksoum d'après la numismatique": *JES*, 6 (1968), p. 1.

14. About 400 coins were discovered by Paribeni and all of them belonged to Israel. R. Paribeni, *Ricerche nel luogo dell'antica Adulis*, (Rome, 1908), col. 73; E. Littmann, "Eine Goldmünze", p. 272; C. Conti Rossini, "Monete Aksumite": *Africa Italiana*, 1 (1927), p. 203; F. Anfray, *op. cit.*, p. 1. A recent excavation in Adulis by the Institute of Ethiopian Archaeology unearthed an excellent specimen of a gold coin, belonging to Israel; it is now on display in the Institute's museum.

15. A. Mordini, "Appunti di numismatica aksumita": *AE*, 3 (1959), p. 182.

16. *Ibid.*; C. Conti Rossini is also anxious to attribute the coin with Ge'ez legend to Israel, *Storia d'Etiopia*, p. 216.

b) Gebre Meskal

According to both hagiographical sources and the lists of kings, he ruled Ethiopia for fourteen years (534–548). His reign is generally indicated as peaceful, and hence he devoted his time and effort to building churches in various places.¹⁷ *Gedle Afsé* attributes the construction of St. Mary's church in Yeha to him.¹⁸ Apparently he visited the site and encouraged the work, while *Gedle Aregawi* mentions that the monastery church of Debre Damo, which is still in existence, was built in his presence.¹⁹ The architecture of this church is of Aksumite style and rectangular in shape, with alternate recessions and projections, both horizontally and vertically. The panels of swastika-type crosses and different animals is characteristic of Aksumite art.²⁰ According to one tradition, the Debre Damo church was the second church built in Ethiopia after the Mariam Sion Church at Aksum²¹ in the second year of Gebre Meskal's reign. After its construction, he donated land and ecclesiastical objects to the church.²²

Ethiopian tradition also attributes the foundation of Zur Amba Church in Gaynt, Begémdir, to his reign. It is said that *Abba Aregawi* beheld a vision in which he was instructed to build another church on a site similar to Debre Damo. He wandered far and wide over the countryside to find a suitable place. Finally, he came to Zur Amba which closely resembles Debre Damo. There he founded a church where St. Yared spent over ten years, teaching his hymns. This fact reveals the missionary activities undertaken jointly by some of the Nine Saints and Ethiopians westwards of Aksum beyond the river Tekezzé.

Gebre Meskal also built a palace next to that of his father, which one tradition strongly suggests to be his tomb. Most probably this tradition developed from the fact that sarcophagi were found later in the crypt of the palace. This practice was common in the Aksumite period. During the recent excavations conducted at Matara, a similar type of tomb was found in section D of the site.²³ Another tradition asserts that the building was merely a palace, however.

Though the hagiographical sources emphasize Gebre Meskal's religious activities, the chronicles underline his cultural contributions. The different lists of Aksumite Emperors mention briefly the most important event of his reign: the introduction by St. Yared, of music, which is said to be of divine origin.²⁴ In fact, the hymns composed by Yared are of great literary value and are still used in the Ethiopian Church. From the description it seems that Gebre Meskal encouraged the arts. We are told, "when they heard the sound of his voice, the King and the Queen and the bishops and

17. ወንጌላ ገብረ መስቀል በጽድቅ ወበርቲዕ ወተሰምዓ መንግሥቱ ኩሉ ምድረ አዘብ ወአለቦ ዘተቃወሃ ለመንግሥቱ ። ዘገብ ኢይወጽዕ ለፀብዕ ዘእንበለ ለሐኒያ ለብያተ ክርስቲያናት እስመ ነገሡ በዘመነ ሉዓም I. Guidi, "Il Gadla Aragawi", p. 71 (text).

18. "Gedle Afsé", p. 174; see Sergew Hable-Selassie, "New Historical Elements in the Gedle Afsé": *JSS*, 9 (1964), p. 202.

19. "Il Gadla Aregawi", p. 73; D. H. Matthews and A. Mordini, "The Monastery of Dabra Damo, Ethiopia": *Archaeologia*, 97 (1959), p. 50 ff.

20. A. Mordini, "Il soffitto del secondo vertibolo dell'Enda Abuna Aragawi in Dabra Dammo": *RSE*, 6 (1947), p. 30 ff.; D. H. Matthews, "The Restoration of the Monastery Church of Debra Damo, Ethiopia": *Antiquities*, 23 (1949), p. 188 ff.; D. Buxton, "The Christian Antiquities of Northern Ethiopia": *Archaeologia*, 92 (1947), p. 6 ff.

21. D. H. Matthews, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

22. *Ibid.*

23. F. Anfray et G. Annequin, "Matara, deuxième, troisième et quatrième campagnes de fouilles": *AE* 5 (1965), p. 67; see plate XLVII.

24. Sergew Hable-Selassie, "Yared": *Yememhran Dims*, 1 (1965), p. 17.

priests and the king's nobles ran to the church and they spent the day in listening to him".²⁵ From that time onwards Yared became an intimate friend of the Emperor and the personal adviser of Gebre Meskal in all cultural matters. Together they instituted the festival of Hosanna to commemorate the triumphal advent of Jesus into Jerusalem. On this occasion someone rides on the back of a donkey round the courtyard of the church, while the people go forward holding palm branches in their hands and all chant, "Hosanna in the highest!" The priests go in procession, bearing their crosses and censers, and chanting Psalm 117. The festival is very colourful and even today attracts many people from different places.

Gebre Meskal is also credited with instituting the religious ceremony of the coronation.²⁶ It seems that prior to his reign there was only a secular form of coronation, even after the introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia. Unfortunately we lack details of the secular coronation ceremony. From the many existing throne stones, we can assume that, before his coronation,²⁷ each Aksumite emperor had to set up his own stone on which his throne was placed and where he would be acclaimed by the people. Now it was decided that the coronation should be performed in the courtyard of the church and that it would be accompanied by lengthy prayers, mainly consisting of the Psalms of David, the themes of which related to the emperor in one way or another. Afterwards, the people acclaimed the emperor. From that time perhaps it became unnecessary for the emperor to prepare a throne stone for his coronation but to use the old ones.

We have very little information about Gebre Meskal's political activities within and outside the Empire. Some chronicles, however, mention that in the seventh year of his reign he went to Jerusalem, in commemoration of which he built a palace in Samaria at Nablus.²⁸ Tabari records an interesting incident which he claims to have found in Mohammad ben Djarir's book, *Moubteddâ*:

"The Negasi, the King of Abyssinia, desired to build a church that would bear his name at Antioch in Syria. For this purpose, he sent a man to make an estimate of the necessary outlay and of the quantity of wood needed. He collected all the wood, of all dimensions, both large and small, already cut and prepared to be used for construction. He had it loaded on a big ship and then added a further supply of wood and also put aboard the ship skilled carpenters and an overseer, providing them with the money needed for their expenses. He then sent them to Syria to construct the church. There was abundant wood in Syria, but the King of Abyssinia wanted to use his own wood, in accordance with one of those whims usual in a king. While the vessel was passing close to Jeddah it sank; but the wood floated on the sea. The people from the vessel clung to the wood and the wind carried them to Jeddah where they landed. They collected and brought ashore all the wood which was floating on the surface of the sea. Then the overseer and others discussed what they

25. E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, (Cambridge, 1928), vol. III, p. 876. This may be the origin of the feast of *Tegesel Tsigé*, ተቀጽል ጽጌ observed on the 10th of Meskerem (20 September). On this occasion the priests go to the palace and offer flowers to the Emperor to commemorate the fact that Yared crowned Gebre Meskal with flowers. They sing "ተቀጽል ጽጌ ገብረ መስቀል ሐገጌ" (Be crowned with flowers, O Emperor Gebre Meskal).

26. Manoel de Almeida provided us with detailed information about the religious coronation ceremony. *Some records of Ethiopia 1593–1646*, trans. C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford, (London 1954), pp. 92–96.

27. J. Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar'a Yä'eqōb et de Baieda Märyām rois d'Éthiopie de 1434–1478*, (Paris, 1893), pp. 49–50.

28. Chronicle Ms. in the possession of Qése-Gebez Tekle Haimanot of Aksum, p. 62.

should do next. Some said, 'We are carpenters, we have sufficient wood here to build another vessel and to take the rest to Syria'. Others said, ['Such a small quantity] would not be worthy of the king; let us hire another vessel on which to travel.' The overseer said: 'I do not dare to do anything without the King's authorization. I shall write to him and we shall wait his orders here.'

When the inhabitants of Mecca heard this news, Abu-Talib and the elders of the city came to Jeddah and asked the overseer to sell them the wood at whatever price he wished. They said to him: 'Sell us this wood and lend us the services of these carpenters at the salary you choose, for we are re-building the temple of the Ka'aba; that temple which was erected to God by Abraham.' The overseer replied: 'Wait until I ask for the orders of the king.' He hired a vessel and sent a messenger with a letter to the king in which he described what had happened to him and the ship-wreck, and asked him whether he should return or go on to Syria. At the end of the letter he mentioned the proposal made by the people of Mecca. The Negus wrote to the overseer. 'I donate all the wood to the temple of the Ka'aba. Go to Mecca with the carpenters and let them build the temple. Spend the money which you have with you for the construction.' The overseer did as he was told and then returned.²⁹

This tradition goes back to the 6th century, probably to the time of Gebre Meskal's reign. Both traditions, Ethiopian and Arabian, have something in common. To what extent one has influenced the other is, at this stage, very hard to say.

The end of Gebre Meskal is obscure. According to oral tradition, he went to Eastern Tigré to wage war and was killed. His body was buried at a nearby church of Debre Selam, in Asbi, but later it was taken to Debre Damo where it still remains. He has been canonized by the Ethiopian Church and his feast is observed on 30 *Hidar*.³⁰

3. The Career of Yared

An important event which occurred during the reign of Gebre Meskal was the rise of Yared, the author of the *Digwa*, the Ethiopian hymnary, and the composer of Ethiopian church music. We have information about Yared from various sources.³¹ These basically agree, they differ only in certain details. Neither of them can be classified as a first-hand source; however, they contain many historical elements which enlighten us about the life and work of Yared. Perhaps it might be necessary to apply an allegorical interpretation to discover the real meaning of the content. Since these books have been written for religious purposes, to satisfy the sentiment of Ethiopian piety, we should not expect them only to contain an accurate account of historical facts.

According to these sources, Yared was born in Aksum, most probably in the first half of the sixth century. As in the case of Caleb, his name is also of Biblical origin.³² From other additional information we hear that the father of Yared was called Inberem and his mother was Tewleya.³³ At that time, Aksum was at a peak of material

29. Tabari, *Chronique*, trans. H. Zotenberg (Paris, 1958), vol. II, pp. 388-390.

30. W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, vol. I, p. 308; erroneously Budge identifies him with Emperor Amda Sion (1314-1344).

31. *Acta Yared et Pantalewon*: CSCO *Scriptores Aethiopici* (Paris, 1904); The Ethiopian Synaxar for the date of 11 *Ginbot* (19 May), see Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, vol. III, pp. 875-877; Aklile Birhan Welde Qirqos, *Yā Qeddus Yared Tarikenna Yā Zēnaw Meleketoch*, (Addis Ababa, 1959 E.C.). One can also find a few historical elements in the *Digwa*.

32. Yared (Jared) was the son of Mahalaleel (Genesis V: 15-20).

33. According to Aklile Birhan, his mother's name was Christina, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

prosperity and spiritual development. It was not only the capital city of the empire but also a centre of learning. One of the scholars who disseminated the culture of the day was Abba Gédéwon, the uncle of Yared. This man taught in the courtyard of Aksum Sion Church. Yared attended the school run by his uncle, Gédéwon. He was, however, not intelligent enough to memorize the Psalter. For this reason, Abba Gédéwon beat him severely and inflicted great pain upon him. He then fled from the town and crawled under a tree near the tomb of Menelik I, which is located about five kms. west of the city of Aksum. There, he witnessed the repeated efforts of a caterpillar to climb a tree. Yared followed the caterpillar's progress intently and finally realized that patience is the main factor of progress. He returned to his teacher and asked pardon for his offence and begged to be accepted again as a pupil. It seems that Yared's memory improved miraculously and he completed his studies in record time. It is even said that: "He learned in one day the books of the Old and the New Testaments". After that, he became a deacon and served at Aksum Sion Church. He married a girl with whom he lived in harmony for many years and by whom he had children. Later he was ordained as a priest and succeeded to the position of his uncle, Abba Gédéwon.³⁴

His *Gedle* further describes his achievements in the field of music. "In those days, there was no singing of hymns and spiritual songs in a loud voice to well-defined tunes, but men murmured them in a low voice."³⁵ It is obvious here that the author wanted to say that Yared was the man who introduced singing into Ethiopia. According to his life story, his music was "not a result of learning, but a matter of inspiration. And God, wishing to raise up to himself a memorial, sent unto him three birds from the garden of Eden, and they held converse with Yared in the speech of man and they caught him up and took him to the heavenly Jerusalem, and there he learned the song of the four and twenty priests of heaven. And when he returned to himself he went into the first church of Aksum at the third hour of the day and he cried out with a loud voice saying, 'Hallelujah to the Father, Hallelujah to the Son, Hallelujah to the Holy Spirit'.³⁶

It is interesting to note here that a similar legend exists in the Greek Church about musical inspiration. A certain man named Romanos went to the church of the Virgin Mary in Constantinople in the middle of the night and started to praise Her with a loud voice. He was the man who arranged the church music to be sung in eight different modes. Romanos, like Yared, lived in the sixth century.

Such legends do not exist in other Churches. How did these two Churches come to have common sources of musical inspiration? There is some support in oral tradition for the idea that Yared went to Greece and studied philosophy and Greek literature. He himself emphasizes in his Book of Hymns that he twice visited Rome, presumably Constantinople, and greatly admired the city.³⁷ But his book does not reflect Greek culture. There are a few words of Greek origin, like "theatre", but these might have been adopted as technical terms from the Christian world. The concepts and general idea of his book are Christian and have little to do with Greek philosophy. If we compare the melodies of Yared with those of Romanos, we do not find much similarity.³⁸ The music

34. *Ibid.*, A different version is found in the Chronicle composed by Tekle Giorgis p.12 which says that his music was the result of marital troubles which caused him distress and unhappiness. He left the city and isolated himself on a mountain where he began to compose music to console himself. This chronicle is critical of his contribution by saying that the learning of the *Digwa* absorbed the time of the priests and did not allow them to concentrate on their study of theology.

35. Budge, *op. cit.*, p. 875.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 876.

37. Aklile Birhan, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

38. Budge, *op. cit.*,

of Yared is basically oriental in tone and if there is any influence at all, it would not be Byzantine. One must understand that it is their common belief which provides the similarity. Since both countries profess the Christian religion, they have attributed the origin of music to God. But when we come to examine the musical notation, the situation is quite different, as it seems as if both may have had a common origin.

The discovery of music was considered as the most important achievement of that century. For this reason, the Ethiopian chronicles emphasize this point. The music of Yared impressed the Ethiopian people as a whole. In the life story of Yared we are told: "When they heard the sound of his voice, the King and the Queen and the Bishops and the Priests, and the King's nobles, ran to the church and they spent the day in listening to him".³⁹ In connection with this, there is an episode which took place at that time. "One day whilst Saint Yared was singing by the foot stool of King Gebre Meskal, the King was so deeply absorbed (in listening to) his voice, that he drove his spear into the flat part of Yared's foot with such force that much blood spurted out; but Saint Yared did not know of it until he had finished his song. And when the King saw this, he was dismayed and he drew his spear out of his foot...".⁴⁰ The king was ready to compensate him with any kind of reward. "Ask me whatever reward thou wishest in return for this, thy blood which hath been shed."⁴¹ But the reward which Yared wanted was solitude. He wanted to be left alone to compose and sing his music. The King was unhappy about his departure, but as he had given his word, it could not be helped. Yared left Aksum with his followers and settled in the mountains of Simien, where he lived until his death on 11 *Ginbot* (19 May). Ethiopian oral tradition, however, tells us that Yared escaped death like some Biblical figures. Another version of the story recounts that the Emperor Gebre Meskal went with *Abba Aregawi* and Yared to the province of *Begémdir* where they spent two years at *Tana Qirqos*. During this period, the Emperor constructed the church of that name, while Yared taught his hymns. Today at *Tana Qirqos* there can still be found a copy of the *Digwa*, without musical notation, attributed to Yared. After two years had elapsed, the Emperor accompanied by the two holy men proceeded to *Gaynt* where he built the church of *Zur Amba*. Then they returned to Aksum, where Yared composed the fourteen anaphoras of the Ethiopian church. After this, he retired to the *Simien* mountains and embraced the monastic life until his death.

4. The Contributions of Yared to the Development of Ethiopian Culture

a. Education⁴²

Yared can be considered as the founder of traditional education as practised in Ethiopia. In his own life story, we find certain educational principles which are applied in Ethiopia up to the present time. According to the theories laid down in his *Gedle*, man is basically susceptible to education. He can learn if he concentrates and exerts effort. There is no man who can be classified as unreceptive to learning. In other words, there are idle men, but not unintellectual ones. Therefore, the teacher should use a stick if necessary to arouse his pupils from idleness. On the other hand, the gradual development

39. Budge, *op. cit.*,

40. *Ibid.*,

41. *Ibid.*,

42. Sergew Hable-Selassie, "Yared" p.15ff; *Aleqa Embaqom Qaleweld* has compiled a short description of the traditional school which was translated into English by Mengistu Lemma, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education*, (Center for Education in Africa, Institute of International Studies, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 1970). A more descriptive work was written by *Liqa Siltanat*. Habte Mariam Werqineh, *ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጵያ ትምህርት* (Addis Ababa, 1971).

of human intellect is fully recognized. For this reason, education is divided into three sections: elementary, secondary, and higher education. Poetry and music constitute the main part of traditional Ethiopian education. Education in Ethiopia is, in principle, based on Christian ethics. Consequently, textbooks are often religious literature. To give some idea of this type of education: elementary education consists of the memorization of the alphabet, followed by the reading of some Biblical passages and other books. The study of the Psalms is the final stage of elementary education. The initial process of learning is as follows: first, the pupil has to learn to distinguish the letters by indicating them with a long stalk of grass, this is called *guter* (ሞጥር) after that, he starts to read slowly, *nebab* (ንባብ) and then quickly, *wurd nebab*, (ወርድ ንባብ). This is the stage when the pupil starts school. At the same time, he has to learn prayers by heart during the night.

When a pupil finishes the Psalms, he is considered to have completed elementary education. He has the right to be a deacon and to serve the church until a certain age. He is also qualified to pursue secondary education which gives him a higher position in the hierarchy of the church. Secondary education itself is divided into two sections: practical and theoretical. The practical studies consist of singing the songs of Yared with the object of serving in the church as a *debertera*.⁴³ The duration of this period depends on the receptivity of the pupils and their regular attendance. The content of this course is both oral and written. The oral part consists of memorizing certain songs by heart, the latter is the study of the songs of different hymns from manuscripts: *Some Digwa* and *Mezgebe Digwa*. The teaching of *Zéma* (melody) in Ethiopia is not collective but individual. The teacher cannot teach the same subject to more than two persons at the same time. For this reason, he uses the knowledge of more advanced students to teach the beginners. When a pupil finishes the *Some-Digwa* he starts the *Digwa*. This is the last stage of secondary education. A man who has completed the *Digwa* is a qualified *debertera* who can serve in the church, but he has no qualifications to teach. Anyone who wishes to teach must go to Bethlehem in *Begémdir* where he has to repeat the *Digwa*. After he has revised the whole text, he is then qualified to be an instructor of *Digwa* in any place he chooses. Bethlehem became the centre of *Digwa* learning in the time of *Serse Dingil* (1563-1597). It is said that from the time of the invasion of *Ahmad Gragn* in 1527 up to the time of *Serse Dingil*, the text of the *Digwa* could not be found. *Serse Dingil* exerted extensive efforts to find the *Digwa*, and it was eventually discovered at Bethlehem. Then he designated this monastery as the final authority in *Digwa* learning.

The theoretical part of traditional learning consists of the study of the verse form known as *Qine* and Yared is considered to be its originator. This may not be accurate because the first literary work in any language begins with poetry. To this general rule of literary development, Ethiopia is not likely to be an exception. Ge'ez literature must

43. The word *ደብተራ* originally meant a tent. This connotation appears in *Jes. 33: 20*, *Jer. 10: 10*, *Judith 6: 10*, *10: 20*. In this connection it was attached closely to *Tabernacle* in the sense that the Ark of Covenant was the abode, hence the verbs, *ደብተረ ተደብተረ*. As the Ethiopian Church has some practices in common with the old Hebrew Temple, in particular as far as the Ark of Covenant is concerned, the one who is serving in the Church both vocally and using musical instruments is called *ደብተራ*. In colloquial usage *ደብተራ* means a learned man *አይጥፍ ደብተራ ከንፍ የለው አጥራ*. The *debertera* who does not write and eagle which does not fly [are not worthy of the name]. See the word in A.Dillmann, *Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicæ*, (New York, 1955), col. 1109; Kidane Weld Kifle, *መጽሐፈ ሠዋስው ወገሥ ወመዝገብ ቃላት ሐዲስ* (Addis Ababa, 1948 E.C.), pp. 337-338.

have started in the form of poetry and later developed into prose, but it does not matter that we do not yet possess evidence for that. Yared lived at a time when the Ge'ez language was already highly developed, and therefore, it is unlikely that he was the originator of poetry in this country. He should rather be considered as the promoter of poetry. As we shall see below, his work, known as the *Digwa*, is a mixture of poetry and prose. But his poetry is simple. It can be classified as epic, and it is not the form, characteristic of Ethiopian poetry, which later evolved as "wax and gold".

The instructor of *Qine* teaches Ge'ez vocabulary, grammar and syntax. He further composes *Qine* which he explains and analyses to his students. *Qine* is a collective course in which many students participate, but its composition is left to the individual. Following the example of the teacher, the student is supposed to compose his own *Qine*. Here we see the principal idea of poetry, *poetas nascitur non fit*, applies only in a very general way. There is no absolute freedom of poetry in Ethiopia; it has its own limitations and regulations. Whereas in other countries a poet has a special liberty in his use of language and is not expected necessarily to observe grammatical and syntactical rules, in Ethiopia it is the contrary. A man who composes *Qine* should strictly observe linguistic rules, being careful in his selection of words and expressing himself accurately. Actually, every piece of poetry in Ge'ez should have rhyme and rhythm. The number of rhymes depends on the kind of *Qine* which the poet intends to produce. The number of verses is limited, varying from two to eleven, and the poet must keep this in mind and write within this framework. A poet should also keep in mind the rhythm. Every verse consists of a certain number of words, and this should be taken into consideration, otherwise the poem loses its character.

According to this rule, there are twelve main categories of *Qine* in Ge'ez:

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1. ጉባዔ ቃና | <i>Guba'e Qana</i> has two verses. |
| 2. ዘለምላኪየ | <i>Ze'amlkeye</i> has three verses. |
| 3. ሚበገዝተ | <i>Mibezhu</i> has three verses, longer. |
| 4. ዋዜማ | <i>Wazema</i> has five verses (both short and long). |
| 5. ሥላሴ | <i>Selassie</i> has six verses |
| 6. ዘይእዜ | <i>Zey'ze</i> has five verses |
| 7. ሳህልክ | <i>Sahilike</i> has three verses |
| 8. መወድስ | <i>Mewedis</i> has eight verses |
| 9. ክህልክሙ | <i>Kulkimu</i> has nine verses |
| 10. አንገላ | <i>Hensiha</i> , has two verses |
| 11. ክብር ይእቲ | <i>Kibre Ye'ti</i> , has four verses |
| 12. ዕጣን ጥገር | <i>Ethane Moger</i> , has eleven verses ⁴⁴ |

The characteristic form of *Qine* is described as ሰምና ፀርቅ or wax and gold. This form of verse, originating in Ge'ez, but today much practised in Amharic, is based on the *double entendre*. The apparent, literal meaning of the words is known as the 'wax', but the subtle, hidden inner meaning is the 'gold.'

This kind of poetry is typically Ethiopian. It has been greatly influenced by Ethiopian concepts. Even the expressions found in daily life in Amharic are full of ambiguity.⁴⁵

Higher education in Ethiopia consists of explanations of religious books. They are divided into four groups: a) the Old Testament, b) the New Testament, c) the *Liqawint* (the works of the Church Fathers, Athanasius, Cyril, Basil, St. John Chrysostom, etc.)

44. H. Weld Blundell, *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia, 1769-1840* (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 533-534.

45. For further details see D. Levine, *Wax and Gold*, (University of Chicago Press, 1965.)

and d) the *Mesihafe Menekosat*, books concerned with ascetic and monastic life.⁴⁶ The explanation involves both linguistic and historical analysis, and there are very few people qualified in all four areas. The man who is familiar with only one area is considered a well-educated man, and he is automatically classified as a scholar in the circle of the Ethiopian Church. He is then a candidate for a higher position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The requirement for studying these "explanations" is a knowledge of *Qine*.

The principal centres of learning vary from time to time. It has depended to some extent upon the political situation of the country. Whenever the capital city or seat of government has moved, the centre of learning has also moved. For example, during the period of the Gondar dynasty, Gondar was the only centre where people studied explanations of the books, but nowadays chairs of learning can be found in other cities and places as well.

b. Literature

Yared occupies a unique position in the history of literature during the Aksumite period. He is believed to be the composer of the hymnary or *Digwa*; this has been described in the Ethiopian Synaxar as follows: "And he arranged hymns for each season of the year, for summer and winter and spring and autumn, and for festivals and Sabbaths, and for the days of angels, the prophets, the martyrs, and the righteous".⁴⁷ The etymology of the word *Digwa* derives from the word ደገደገ: (to be thin) or *être maigre*.⁴⁸ It probably received this name since it is written in very fine script, in order to leave more space between the lines to insert the musical notation. The sources for the *Digwa* are the Bible and the works of the Church Fathers. It was presented in the form of poetry and divided into three main parts according to the contents:

a) ሰመን ፡ ተሰገሰ ፡ b) ሰመን ፡ አስተምህሮ ፡ c) ሰመን ፡ ፋሲካ ፡ d) ሰመን ፡ ክረምት ፡

The *Some-Digwa*, which is used during the Lent period, should also be included here. It appeared separately from the *Digwa*. Another way of classifying the *Digwa* is by seasons as in the Synaxar: i.e. as hymns of spring and summer, autumn and winter. According to oral tradition, Yared's pupils, Sewira, Menkra, Eskindir and Bedir introduced this classification.

Basically the *Digwa* is a collection of hymns attributed exclusively to Yared. As previously mentioned, it was presented in the form of poems, and this was generally accepted by Ethiopian scholars. They call the *Digwa* ግገላተ ፡ ያሬድ ፡ which means "songs of Yared". But they consider it as a disadvantage that these hymns have no rhyme. Just to emphasize this point, a certain scholar composed the following *Qine*:

ተተሕተ ያሬድ ብእሊ ዘኢተተሕተ
እስመ ለቅዱሱ ሕገጌ ኢሕነፀ ቤተ

Yared, a man who should not be
ridiculed, became ridiculous,
because he failed to build a house
(rhyme) for his son *Qine*.

46. These are *Filkesios* which deal with monastic life and are the work of Philoxenus of Mabdag, of Syrian origin of the 6th century; *Mar Yesaq*, the ascetic works of Isaac of Nineveh, also Syrian of the 6th century; and, last but not least, *Aregawi Menfessawi*, an ascetic treatise of John of Saba, also Syrian of the 6th century. (E. Cerulli, "Letterature": *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, vol. V. (1950), p. 698).

47. Budge, *The Book of the Saints*, vol. III p. 876.

48. S. Grébaut, *Supplément en Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicae de August Dillmann (1865) et édition du Lexique de Juste d'Urbain (1850-1855)*, (Paris, 1952). This verb does not appear in the 1862 edition of Dillmann's Lexicon, but ደገ is listed with the explanation: *cantus ecclesiasticus*. See col. 1130; Kidane Weld Kifle, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

But this criticism does not seem altogether justified, as is proved by a close examination of the text. Rhyme can be found in many of his hymns. For example, let us take one passage from each section:

ጎረዳ ዐሠርተ ወክልኝተ ሓዋርያተ
ሂሞሙ ኖሎተ
ወሀበሙ ሀብታተ
ይስብኩ ቃላተ
ሠለስተ እስማተ
ወአሐደ መንግሥተ

Zemene Astemhro

እምቤተ አቡሁ ሌሊተ ወጽኦ
ወእምደብረ ዘይት እስኪማ ነሥኦ
ኢትዮጵያ በፈረስ መጽኦ
ሊባኖስ ተሠይመ ብዑዑ
ዜናሁ ተለሄ ተስሞዓ

Zemene Fasika

አልቦ ቅድሚሁ ወአልቦ ደጎራሁ
ለያሬድ ካህን በመገልጸሁ
ማገሌተ ትንሣኤ ዘይደምፅ ጉርኒሁ
ዕፍረተ ወንጌል ምዕዘኒ አፋሁ ።

The hymns of Yared are epic in kind. He glorified the struggle and achievements of angels, saints and martyrs, in very expressive and poetic language. As a rule, all poetry in Ethiopia is epic. The most characteristic form of Ethiopian verse, as we have already mentioned, wax and gold, can scarcely be traced in the hymns of Yared. It seems that this form of poetry had not evolved at that time.

The question is now whether the *Digwa* in its present form was actually written by Yared. We have two kinds of *Digwa*; a short version and a detailed one which is called the *Mezgebe Digwa*. The latter version has been elaborated on by later Ethiopian scholars.⁴⁹ This can easily be proved from the inclusion of hymns composed to glorify saints who lived after the sixth century. Even longer hymns are dedicated to Yared himself in *Zemene Fasika*. They are composed in the third person, and it is clear that they were the work of another poet. Therefore, the conclusion is that the *Digwa* was originally the work of Yared, but that in a later period, it was elaborated on by other scholars and many hymns were incorporated into it.

The significance of the *Digwa* is considerable. Although it was presented in the general form of poetry, there are passages relating to theology, as well as philosophy, history and ethics. The theological teaching in the *Digwa* and that professed and taught by the Ethiopian Church today obviously both derive from the same origin. Both are based on the Bible and the teachings of the Church Fathers. According to the *Digwa*, God is three in hypostasis, One in divinity (ሠለስተ እስማተ ወአሐደ መንግሥተ). He is eternal, holy, just, omnipotent, righteous in the absolute sense of the word.

መሓሪ ዘአልቦ መዓት
ጸድቅ ውሉቱ ዘአልቦ ኃጢአት
መኩንን ውሉቱ ዘአያደሉ ለገጽ ።

49. Kidane Weld Kifle, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

He is the Creator of the visible and the invisible world.

እምላክ ፍጹም በሀላፊሁ
ዘሀሎ እምቅድመ ይትፈጠር ዓለም
እንዘ በመንግሥቱ ይኳንን ዓለመ
ሰማየ ገብረ ለስብሐቲሁ
ዓለመ ፈጠረ
ወምድረ ሣረረ
ወገሠፀ ባሕረ

Man was created, as the Bible says, in His image, but he is not perfect in his knowledge and conduct. This perfection depends on one's faith in God and comes through intensive exercise in goodness.

መኑ ሰብእ ዘኢየሱስ
ወመኑ ዘተወልደ ዘኢገደገ ለሥርዓትክ
ወሰብእሰ ፍጹም ወኢይትረከብ
ወለዘኒ ስሕተ አንተ ትክል መይጦተ መንገሌክ
ለጸድቃን እለ ወሀብኩሙ ምግባረ ሠናይ
ለእመ መሐርከነ እግዚአ
ውሉተ አሚረ ትስመይ መሓሪ

This can be achieved only through knowledge of God. Man, therefore, has to pursue wisdom, i.e., to cultivate in himself fear and respect for God, and this is the beginning of wisdom. The world was created by God for His glory and it is subject to destruction after the end of its service.

In the *Digwa*, we find certain elements of philosophy which remained static in their primitive stage. Curiosity is the starting point of philosophy, that is to say of theoretical knowledge. In other words, it is a basic requirement for it. Man has to search and acquire it. This has been underlined in a very clear manner. In *Zemene Yohannes*,⁵⁰ Yared says: ዑቅ ፣ ወጤይቅ ፣ እእምር ወለቡ "Wisdom is the only invaluable gift of man". Nothing in this world can be compared with wisdom. Therefore, it is better to acquire wisdom than accumulate wealth. Gold, silver, diamonds or any kind of precious stones cannot be compared with wisdom. The essence of wisdom is actually interpreted in a religious sense: it is the fear of God.

ጥበብ ትጌይስ እምብዙኅ መዛግብት
ኢወርቅ ሂጦ
ወኢብሩር ተውላጦ
ጥበብ ክቡራት ዕንቅ መሠረታ
አልቦ ለጥበብ ዘይመስላ

Yared further tells how a man can acquire knowledge. It can be achieved by studying books which guide him to the right way of life:

ዑቅ ወልድየ ኢትገደገ ተጋሥሦ መጸሕፍት
እስመ በሆየ ትረከብ ፈሪሃ እግዚአብሔር

The *Digwa* also contains historical information expressed in poetic form. There is detailed reference to *Abba Selama*, the first bishop of Ethiopia. Yared praises him for his missionary activities in Ethiopia. He dedicated many hymns, based on historical fact, to the Nine Saints. He mentions their origin, how they came to Ethiopia, the places where

50. From the literary point of view that is the best part of the *Digwa*.

they were active as missionaries and so forth. In its historical aspects, the *Digwa* is a very useful source for church history.

c. Music

According to Yared himself, music is of divine, not human origin. When Ethiopians want to give an absolute value to something they attribute it to God. Since God is perfect, His work also is perfect. But while reflecting the divine, music can also convey a power and attractiveness of its own. We are told that all people, including the king, were attracted to the music of Yared and spent the whole day listening to his hymns at the Aksum Sion church.

This music has three modes: *Ge'ez*, *Araray* and *Ezil*.⁵¹ The first mode is used on fast days, and during days of mourning, the second on ordinary days, and the third during great festivals. In the Synaxar the quality of his music is described as follows: "And there were not lacking in these three modes any of the sounds that are made by men and birds and beasts".⁵²

From where then did Yared derive his inspiration—from rational thought? To answer this, we must again examine his *Digwa*. The *Digwa* contains abundant material concerning the Nine Saints, a fact which pre-supposes an intimate relationship between Yared and these Saints. Moreover, the melody shows connections with Syriac music, so it is possible that the Nine Saints, who contributed so much to Ethiopian culture, might also have contributed in one way or another to the creation of Ethiopian music which Yared later developed. There is a passage in *Liber Axumae* which is related to this question:

ወክሰበ ተጋብሎት ለፍ ቅዱሳን አግብርተ አግቢአብሐር ዘከመ ተናገረቶም አግዘአትነ ግርዖም ወላጁተ አምላክ ውስተ አሐቲ ሀገር ዘሰግ ግደ ኬርህዋ ለአባ ሀርያቆስ እምብህንባ ወለበሐዊ እምሶርያ ወለያሬድ ካህን እምላክሱም እስመ ትቤሉ ለለበሐዊ ሀብ ውዳሴ ለያሬድ ካህን ወለአባ ሀርያቆስ ትቤሉ ሀብ ቅዳሴ ለያሬድ ካህን ወተጽእኑ በደመና ብርሃን ወተገሥኡ እምብሐርም ወበጽሑ ምድረ አክሱም ዘሰግ ግደ ኬርህዋ ወተረክቡ ምስለ ያሬድ ካህን ወወሀቡ መጸሐፍቲህም ወነበሩ እንዘ ይዘያንወ ይ ዕለተ ወፍ ሌሊተ ወተመደሙ ብሐርም በሰላም ምስጋና⁵³

Again, there is the story of the reunion of the three just servants of God; and of how Our Lady Mary the Mother of God spoke to Abba Heryakos bishop of Behnesa, to Labhawi the Syrian, and to Yared the priest of Aksum, and brought them together in one place which is called May Kerwah. To Labhawi she said, 'Give my *wedase* (oration of praise) to Yared the priest'. And to Abba Heryakos she said, 'Give my liturgy to Yared the priest'. And they mounted on a shining cloud and set out from their countries and came to a district of Aksum, the name of which is May Kerwah. And they met together with Yared the priest, and gave him their writings. They stayed for three days and three nights to inform him (of the writings), and returned to their countries in peace.⁵⁴

While examining the evidence attributing the creation of Ethiopian music to Yared, one must also consider a small Greek inscription,⁵⁵ discovered in Aksum, which contains

51. It is interesting to note that the Copts also have three modes: the mode of Adam, the mode of Job, and the mode of Batos. (E. Wellez, "Studien zur aethiopischen Kirchen Musik": *Oriens Christianus* 9 (1920), p. 96.

52. W. Budge, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 846.

53. C. Conti Rossini, *Liber Axumae*, p. 5.

54. F. Alvares, *The Prester John of the Indies*, (Hakluyt Society, London, 1958), vol. II, p. 523. See Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Aksum; ricerche di topografia generale*, (Roma, 1938), p. 51.

55. U. Monneret de Villard, "Per una nuova iscrizione greca di Aksum": *OM*, 19 (1939), p. 320.

a reference to music:

ὠδὴ ψαλμοῦ τοῖς "ode of Psalm to
υἱοῖς Κοτεσιλφᾶ the sons of Kotesilpha"

This seems to prove that music existed in Ethiopia, if not prior to Yared, then at least deriving from a different source, since the content of the inscription is related to the synagogue, while the script is Greek. The combination of these two elements is strongly suggestive of Alexandrian Judaism.⁵⁶

Another controversial issue regarding Ethiopian music is the form of notation used. There are musical signs like: ቅናት : — : ድፋት : — : ደረት :) : ይዘት : ግረት : ፤ ቀርጽ : ፤ ሊድ : ፤ — Chch : . In addition to this, certain letters which indicate a special tone and melody are used as musical signs in Ethiopia, "in the same way as signs for the cantillation are set in the Hebrew texts".⁵⁷

Whether these are the creation of Yared has not yet been ascertained. Some Ethiopian scholars attribute them to him while others reject this theory on the basis of certain evidence. For example in the Chronicle of Gelawdewos (1540–1559), we read the following: ወበመዋዕሊሁ ለንጉሥ ገላውዴዎስ ተንግሥኡ አዛዢ ጌራ ወአዛዢ ራጉኤል ካህናት ዜማ ወጠኑ አውጽኦት ምልክት ዘድገን⁵⁸ (During the reign of Gelawdewos, Azaz Géra and Azaz Râguel began to produce notation for the *Digwa*). If this is true, the musical signs are the product of a later period. But their introduction at a later date would not necessarily mean a change in the melody. Doubtless it remains substantially the same as it was during the time of Yared. This can be deduced if we trace the origin of the notation. It is highly probable that musical notation was introduced into Ethiopia either from Byzantium or from Syria. The similarity of the Ethiopian, on the one hand, and the Greek-Syrian notation on the other, is so close that, at first sight, they appear identical. Even the names of some Ethiopian forms of notation, like ድፋት : ይዘት : ግረት : ቅናት : are literal translations of περισπωμένη, τεγεία, σπαστροφή, ὕφεν.⁵⁹

This seems to provide sufficient grounds for rejecting the authenticity of the abbreviated chronicle which attributes the introduction of Ethiopian notation to the sixteenth century. At that time, neither Byzantium nor Syria exerted any influence over Ethiopia, for obvious reasons. The argument would be strengthened, however, if a pre-sixteenth century version of the *Digwa* containing musical notation could be found. Although I have not come across any examples, I think it is possible that some may exist. Musical notation is marked above the text. If the melody is *Ge'ez* and *Araray*, dark or blue ink will be used. In order to distinguish *Ge'ez* from *Araray*, the writer marks the initial 'G' or 'A' in the margin of the text. If the melody is *Ezil*, then the signs are marked in red ink.

d. Instruments

The music of Yared is performed by a choir accompanied by such instruments as the stick, sistrum and drum. During the opening melody, which is called *Zimame*, the choir of *debertas* move the prayer sticks rhythmically left, right and down as an accompaniment. Then the drum and sistrum are played together. At first, the choir sings slowly and

56. Even if we take as evidence the musical instruments such as the lyre and sistra, we may be able to say that the old Egyptians had, in this respect, influenced the Ethiopians and that music had existed in Ethiopia since early times.

57. D.A. Hughes, *Early Mediaeval Music up to 1300*, (Oxford, 1954), vol. II, p. 48.

58. R. Basset, "Études sur l'histoire d'Éthiopie": *JA*, (1881), p. 109.

59. See a comparative table in Wellez, "Studien zur aethiopischen Kirchen Musik", p. 96.

this section is known as *merged*. When the rhythm grows faster this is called *sifat*.

It is most likely that all three instruments – stick, drum and sistrum – originated from Egypt. The Ethiopian tradition also emphasizes this point of adaptation, the only difference being that it attributes the derivation to Israel. The evidence supporting Egyptian origin, however, is considerable. The long sticks with metal, wood or ivory heads attached to them, are similar to the illustrations of the clappers and percussion sticks found on pre-dynastic objects.⁶⁰ The drums are also of the same egg-shaped form as the Egyptian drums, and similarly they are beaten with the bare hand.⁶¹ We have two types of sistrum in Ethiopia, one is U-shaped with a handle and the other is closed at the top. The latter is in the Egyptian style.⁶² In Egypt, the sistrum was sacred to Hathor and later, when the god metamorphosed into Isis, it became sacred to Isis.⁶³ In Ethiopia, the sistrum too is sacred. It is used only to praise God whereas the drum is used for profane purposes as well.

One further aspect of the music of Yared which should be mentioned here is the dignified, ceremonious dancing of the choir, referred to as *shibsheba*. The Ethiopian church is the only church in the world which utilizes dancing as a form of prayer. As a result, it has been accused of countenancing pagan practices. In reply, the church defends the sacred dance by citing certain passages from the Bible, in particular from Psalm 150: 3–5:

“Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp.
Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.”

Further Biblical justification for this custom is the dance of David in front of the Ark of the Covenant,⁶⁴ and the dance of *Mariam*.⁶⁵ Whether or not their argument is valid is irrelevant. It is not a Christian practice, but it should be remembered that Christianity was born and grew in a purely Jewish community. It is therefore not surprising

60. C. Sachs, *The History of Musical Instruments*, (New York, 1940), pp. 88–89.

61. D.A. Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 49; E. Wellez, *op. cit.*, pp. 83–84.

62. S. Marcuse, *Musical Instruments, a Comprehensive Dictionary*, (London, 1964), p. 478.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 478.

64. II Samuel, 6: 5, 15, 16.

65. Exodus, 15; 20. In the *Digwa* found in the library of the Patriarchate in Addis Ababa it is stated that there were some people who wanted to identify the hymns of Yared with secular songs and dances. In the introduction of the *Digwa* the copyist tries to refute this allegation on the basis of the above and other Biblical passages. ወለምሰብአ ከሀድያን ስመይዎ ለመዝሙር ዘረኑ ወተውኔት ሰባ ተሰለፍሙ ዐቂብ ትምህርት ፡ ለእለሰ ተምህርዎ ይጥዕሙ እመዓር ወሃከር ወያበድርዎ እምወርቅ ወእምብሩር ወለእሉኒ ጸላእያን መዝሙር ናገብሰ ሎሙ ስጣጭ ቃል ወንመውያሙ ነሢኢነ ስምዓ እምቃለ መጻሕፍት ቅዱሳን በባገጹ ወበበእርኣያሁ ፡ ወናሁ ንዚከር ስምዓ ማገሌት እምቃለ ኦሪት ዘዐዓት ፡ ማርያም እገተ ሙሴ እስመ ገለየት ትቤ ሰብሕዎ በከበር ወበመዝሙር በእንተ ፀገተ እስራኤል እምባሕር ኤርትራ ወበእንተ ስጥሙ ለፈርዖን ንጉሥ ዘእስመሙ ሕገናተ በተከዘ ግብፅ ፡ ወዓዲ ትቤ ገልፍ ዙልክሙ ደቂቅ እስራኤል እስመ ሙሴ መስፍኖሙ አዘዘ እንዘ ይብል ንሰብሐ ለእግዚአብሔር ሰብሐ ዘተሰብሐ እስከ ፍጻሜሁ ፡ ወዓዲ ትቤ ኦሪት ዘመሳፍንት ገለየት ማገሌት ዲቦራ ነቢያዊት ወመስፍን ባርቅ አመ ጥዕዎ ለሲሳራ መልክ ምድያም በገባ ደብረ ታቦር ዘተከስተ ቦቱ ምሥጢረ ወልደ እግዚአብሔር ሰብሐ ፡ ወመጽሐፈ ነገሥት ይቤ ገለፍ ቅድመ ታቦት እግዚአብሔር በመዝሙር ዘ፲ቱ አውታሪሁ አመ አተወት ታቦት አምላክ ጽሕፈ እምጊዋጭ አሉፍሊ ፡ መገልጸይ ይብል ገለፍ ሰሎሞን ንጉሥ እስራኤል በእንተ ከርስቶስ ወበእንተ ቤተ ክርስቲያን ቅድስት ፡ ወዓዲ ተብህለ ገለፍት ነጹት ጥዕቶ ለሆሎፎርኒስ መልክ ተለይኒሁ ለንጉሥ ከላውዴዎን ፡ ወዓዲ ተብህለ በቅድመ ዳዊት ዘእስሱ

that some practices of Judaism were adopted by some Christian groups, as is the case here in Ethiopia. However, the uniqueness of the Ethiopian church in this respect should be emphasized.

5. Aksum and the Outside World at the End of the Sixth and Beginning of the Seventh Centuries.

a) South Arabia

Politically speaking, the Aksumite empire ceased to play a leading role after the occupation of South Arabia by the Persians. But this does not mean that it had lost all influence in other fields. After the defeat, Ethiopians settled in North Arabia and penetrated into every sphere of society, be it nomadic,⁶⁶ domestic or artistic.⁶⁷ But their major contribution was to the economic and military aspects of life. We find in the work of Frankel that almost all Arabic words pertaining to the sea and ships are Ethiopic in origin: *bahr* – sea; *rem* – ship; *azéb* = south-west; *mes*, = north-east; *hemer* = ship; *merso* = port; *gela* = veil; *notajawi* = sailor (seaman); *kedefe* = to row; *asteme* = to sink; *sefene* = to be calm.

The port of Adulis was well-known in the pre-Hejira period and is frequently mentioned in the works of the early Arab poets.⁶⁸ Although in this century the Ethiopians had lost their inland territory in South Arabia, they still dominated the Red Sea and probably the coastal area of Arabia.⁶⁹ Ethiopian ships, which were large and fast,

አትናቲዎስ ሊቀ ጳጳሳት ዘለእስከንድርያ አቀመ ዳዊት መዘምራን ዘይተቀነዩ ወናገልዩ ውስተ ቤተ ክርስቲያን በበእብራቶሙ ፡ ወስጥሙ ናድዕ ዘርከብን ጽሑፈ በመዝሙር ዳዊት አላፍ ወሊናዎ ጽሕፈውያን እንዳቡን ወኢሉትም ወስሎሞን ዘኢኮነ ንጉሥ ፡ ወለእሉኒ መዘምራን አቀሞሙ ዳዊት ምስል ማገበራኒሆሙ ከመ ይሰበሕዎ ለእግዚአብሔር ሰብሐ ፡ ምንት በቅዱስ ለማገሌት እመ ኢሃሉ ዜማ ፡ ወምንት ረባሁ ለመስንቅ ለእመ ኢተዋነያ አውታሪት በአገባብ ስንቃሁ ፡ ወእሉኒ ዘዘርናሆሙ ገላይያን ነበሩ እንዘ ገናልዩ በላዮሳስ ፡ አኮት ይቤሉ መጻሕፍት ሰብሕዎ ለእግዚአብሔር ወዘምሩ ለስሙ ፡ ምንት ውእቱ ሰባሌ ዘእንበለ ዜማ ፡ U. Monneret de Villard, who claims to have been the first to study Ethiopian sacred dance, attempts to trace its origin from a certain Christian sect in Egypt who practised sacred dancing sometimes accompanied by musical instruments, during their services. “Su una possibile origine delle danze liturgiche nella chiesa abissina”: OM 22 (1942) pp. 389–397.

66. An early Arab poet composed the following lines:

“The young ostriches gather themselves around him

As a multitude of black Yemenian camels

Assemble around their Abyssinian herdsman

Who is unable to express himself in the language of Arabia”.

W.A. Clouston, *Arabian Poetry*, (Glasgow, 1881), p. 57. C.J. Lyall who translated *The Mufaddaliyat* notes: “The Abyssinian shepherds and herdsmen from the western coast of the Red Sea employed by the Arabs to look after their flocks and herds of camels are often mentioned by the poets”. *The Mufaddaliyat*, an anthology of ancient Arabian odes compiled by Al-Mufaddal, son of Muhammad, (Oxford, 1918), vol. II, p. 5, n. 15.

67. G. Wiet, *L’Égypte Byzantine et Musulmane*, (Cairo, 1932), vol. II, p. 149; The multifold influence of the Ethiopians can be better illustrated from a number of Ge’ez words in Arabic. S. Frankel, *Die Aramaeischen Fremdwörter in Arabischen*, (Leyden, 1886), pp. 209–232; Th. Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, (Strasbourg, 1910), p. 31 ff; K. Ahrens, “Christliches im Koran”: ZDMG N.F. 9 (1930), p. 22ff; J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, (Berlin, 1897), p. 232; A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’an*, (Baroda, 1938), p. 254 ff.

68. Nabiga 19, 18: Bekri 351, 4, 648, 8 Jakut, II 632, 17; III 797, 13; Agani I 87, 15. See also H. Lammens, “La Meque à la veille de l’Hégire”: *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph*, (Beyrouth, Syrie), tome IX, Fasc. 3 (1924), p. 284.

69. H. Lammens says: “L’occupation successive du Yémen par les Aksumites et par les Perses avait achevé de détruire ce qui subsistait encore de l’ancienne marine himiarite; elle abandonna aux abyssins la maîtrise de l’Erythrée”. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

were engaged in carrying African products such as ivory, slaves and gold to Arabia and in bringing back all the commodities of the Near East. Commerce flourished, particularly between Aksum and the Quraysh of Mecca.⁷⁰ These Venetians of Arabia had no proper port, instead the Aksumite ships anchored in the Bay of Soaiba facing the desert.⁷¹ The commercial links of the Quraysh were extensive. They had concluded a commercial treaty with Aksum as well as with the Byzantine and Persian empires. For this purpose, Hashim, a leading merchant and a member of the ruling class of Mecca, had been sent to Byzantium. There he had obtained not only the consent of the Emperor, but also, as the Arab writers emphasize, a letter of recommendation to the Emperor of Ethiopia. Abdu-Shams, the brother of Hashim, journeyed to Ethiopia to conclude the treaty with the Aksumite Emperor. After Hashim's death, the commercial ties and obligations of the treaty continued to be honoured by his brother who succeeded him.⁷²

Within the republic of Mecca itself, Ethiopians also played an important rôle in organizing the army, a responsibility entrusted to them by the Meccans. It is most likely that the dissolved Ethiopian army, which dispersed after the abortive revolt of Abreha II, had sought refuge in the republic of Mecca and taken service there. They now formed the main body of the army of the republic and, furthermore, the whole military organization was in the hands of the Ahabis (Ohbous) from Abyssinia.⁷³ The aim was not to establish an offensive force, but first to provide an effective protection for the merchants, and secondly to ensure the security of important buildings: they were, in fact, the Swiss Guards of the time in Mecca.⁷⁴ Mufaddal refers to them: "Yea, though I were in the castle of Gumdan with its gates guarded by Abyssinian infantry and a black serpent tame my will.....".⁷⁵

The increase of commerce and wealth necessitated the recruitment of more soldiers from among the Bedouins and slaves, but this did not change the structure and character of the existing military organization and the name *Ahabis* was retained.

"Arabes, Abyssins, visages clairs ou noirs,
Les hommes de la plaine et ceux de la montagne,
Les chasseurs du désert que la soif accompagne,
Et les coupeurs de route aux aguets, dans les soirs;
Tous sont là différents par l'âme, par la race,
Mais tous unis ensemble et mêlés fortement
Ainsi que de moellons par le même ciment,
Par les mêmes ardeurs et par la même audace"⁷⁶

b) Meroë

The politico-religious activities of the Aksumites were directed northwards to

70. The circulation of Aksumite coins parallel to Himyarite coins, in Arabia in the seventh century, is an indication of the close economic ties between Mecca and Aksum. See Conti Rossini, "Monete aksumite": *L'Africa Italiana*, I, p. 184.

71. H. Lammens, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

72. Tabari, *Chronique*, vol. II, pp. 372-373; Mohammad Hamidullah, "Les rapports économique-diplomatiques de la Mecque pré-islamique": *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, (Damas, 1957), vol. 2, pp. 299-301; H. Lammens, "République Marchande de la Mecque vers l'an 600 de notre ère": *Bulletin de l'Institut Égyptien*, 5 ser., vol. 4, p. 26.

73. H. Lammens, "Les «Ahabis» et l'organisation militaire de la Mecque au siècle de l'Hégire": *JA*, 8 (1916), p. 253.

74. H. Lammens, "Les «Ahabis»", p. 245.

75. *The Mufaddaliyat*, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 223.

76. H. Lammens, "Les «Ahabis»", p. 247.

the neighbouring country of Nubia. According to John Bishop of Ephesus,⁷⁷ Christianity was introduced there about 540 A.D., two centuries later than in Aksum. Meroë became an area of dispute between two factions—the Melkites and the Jacobites. Michael of Syria, a Jacobite historian of the twelfth century describes the situation as follows:

"Il y avait donc en Syrie et en Arménie, de même qu'en Palestine et en Égypte, outre le patriarche et les évêques de notre nation, [Syrienne] de nos frères les Égyptiens et des Arméniens, ceux aussi des Grecs chalcédoniens, qui troublaient autant qu'ils pouvaient ces trois nations, et même, quand l'occasion s'en présentait, les Nubiens et les Abyssins..."⁷⁸

There were three independent kingdoms in Nubia; Nabatia (Nuba) in the north; Makuria (Mukurrah) in the centre; and Alodia (Alwa) in the south.⁷⁹ The first and last of these kingdoms were Jacobite while Makuria was Melkite. Archaeological evidence indicates that the Ethiopians also were participants in this religious conflict. J.W. Crowfoot wrote of a church in Dongola which today is a mosque. According to him it "resembles the plan of an Abyssinian church near Adwa".⁸⁰ Considering the extent of Aksumite penetration in the fourth century, this similarity of plan is feasible.⁸¹ Zyhlarz is also of the opinion that the Aksumites exercised influence in Nubia.⁸²

In addition, John Bishop of Ephesus informs us that, in 580 A.D., Longinus met Aksumites in Alwa: "But inasmuch as there are certain Abyssinians, who have fallen into the malady of the fancy of Julianus, and say, that Christ suffered in a body not capable of pain, or of death, we have told them what is the correct belief, and have required them to anathematize this heresy in writing, and have received these persons upon their presenting their recantation".⁸³ Longinus was a disciple of the exiled Patriarch of Alexandria, Theodosius, who had been consecrated bishop of Nubia and had accomplished his mission successfully in this region.⁸⁴ In Alodia he had met Aksumites who professed the teachings of Julian Halicarnassus, who believed that the body of Jesus Christ is incorruptible. From evidence in the text, they do not seem to be clergy but rather laymen of high rank who had come there to settle certain business. Alodia, because of its proximity to the Aksumite Empire and for historical reason of the fourth century, was under the

77. John Bishop of Ephesus, *The Third Part of the Ecclesiastical History*, trans. R.P. Smith, (Oxford, 1860), p. 251 ff.

78. *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche* (1166-1199), ed. and trans., J.B. Chabot (Paris, 1905), Vol. III, p. 226; A. Stenico, "I monumenti cristiani della bassa Nubia": *Atti del Congresso la Lombardia e l'Oriente*, (1962), p. 302.

79. E. Zyhlarz, "I reami della Nubia prima dell'Islam. uno sguardo storico sul Sudan antico e medioevale": *RSE* 3 (1943), p. 255; L.P. Kirwan, "Notes on the Topography of the Christian Nubian Kingdoms": *JEA* 21 (1935), p. 57 ff.

80. J.W. Crowfoot, "Christian Nubia": *JEA* 13 (1927), p. 144.

81. E. Zyhlarz, *op. cit.*, p. 250. On the contrary P.M. Shinnie believes that there was no contact between the two countries. "It is surprising that there seems to have been little or no contact with the neighbouring Christian state of Ethiopia. Nor on present evidence is there any suggestion that these two states were aware of each other." "New Light on Medieval Nubia": *Journal of African History*, 6 (1965), p. 263. More or less the same argument was repeated in his recent article "The Culture of Medieval Nubia and its Impact on Africa": *Sudan in Africa* (Khartoum University Press, 1971), pp. 46-47.

82. E. Zyhlarz, *op. cit.* p. 251. "Già assai presto, forse per influsso di Aksum, vi troviamo delle comunità meroitiche cristiane, verosimilmente anche anteriori a quelle nubiche di settentrione, ad ogni modo in una certa opposizione ad esse."

83. John Bishop of Ephesus, *op. cit.*, p. 323; E. Honigsmann, *Evêques et évêchés monophysites d'Asie antérieure au VI^e siècle*, CSCO, *Subsidia*, Vol. 2 (Louvain, 1951), pp. 131 and 229.

84. John Bishop of Ephesus, *op. cit.*, p. 328; L.P. Kirwan, "Christianity and the Kura'an": *JEA* 20 (1934), pp. 201-202.

immediate political influence of the Aksumites.⁸⁵ However, the teachings of Julian Halicarnassus had not spread widely in Ethiopia and, as we have noted, did not leave fanatical adherents behind. With regard to the Metropolitan Chair of Aksum, it seems probable that it was still vacant for reasons stated above.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the commemoration of the two patriarchs, Dioscurus (444-454) and Johan-nes II (507-516) as saints, indicates the solidarity of the Ethiopian church with the Patriarchate of Alexandria.

c) The Byzantine Empire

Information about the relations existing between the Byzantine and Aksumite emperors is largely from literary sources. Although they were found in two different doctrinal camps, they were prepared to ignore their differences and unite their forces in the face of a common enemy. Unfortunately the sources are not clear as to the details of this alignment. What kind of material aid Aksum contributed to Constantinople when the Avars threatened her existence in 622 A.D., we do not know. It can be verified that the Christians of Ethiopia offered moral support for their co-religionists. They prayed and fasted for eight consecutive days, at this crucial time, so that the danger might be averted. It is interesting to note that today also, a fasting period (Heracles - Ἡρακλῆς) is observed during the Big Lent.⁸⁷ In the Ethiopian Synaxar mention is made of the invasion of Jerusalem by the Persians and the capture of the True Cross in 614 A.D. and its return in 628 A.D.⁸⁸

Arab sources seem to imply that concerted action was taken by the Byzantine and Ethiopian emperors against the Persians. Emperor Heraclius (575-641) was not in a position to withstand a Persian invasion without aid. It seems that he requested military assistance from his co-religionist, the Aksumite emperor. This plan of Heraclius came to the knowledge of the Persian emperor who took appropriate measures against it. Since the Persians had access to the Red Sea, it was not a difficult matter to intervene as the following passage from Tabari reveals:

"Pariwiz, the Persian Emperor, captured a treasury consisting of thousands of vessels full of vestiments, precious stones, pearls, gold and silver. The Byzantine emperor when he was pressed by his enemy dispatched this treasure to Ethiopia. The wind brought the vessels to Oman where they fell into the hands of the Persian king, Pariwiz".⁸⁹ Apparently Tabari is here referring indirectly to Avar's invasion of Constantinople and the precautions taken by Heraclius during this critical time. Because of threatened invasion, he was obliged to transfer some of his treasury to a safer place, such as Ethiopia, but his plan did not work. As Tabari relates, his ships and their precious cargo were captured by the Persians.

In the absence of a common enemy, however, Byzantium and Ethiopia remained conscious of their religious differences. *Kibre Negest* underlines this clearly:

85. E. Zyhlarz, *op.cit.*, p. 254. The great inscription of Silco appears to contradict this view. The opening of the inscription states: "I, Silco, the powerful king of the Noubades, and of all the *Aethiopsians*..." However, as he later claims that he conquered only the Blemmyas and makes no mention of other people of Ethiopia, perhaps it can be regarded as inflated rhetoric rather than substantial proof. John Bishop of Ephesus, *op.cit.*, p. 346.

86. See above, p. 142.

87. The first week of the fasting period is called Heracles.

88. W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints*, Vol. III, pp., 684-686.

89. Tabari, *Chronique*, Vol. II, p. 305.

"For the kings of Ethiopia and the kings of Rômê were brethren and held the Christian Faith. Now first of all they believed in an orthodox manner in the preaching of the Apostles up to [the time of] Constantine, and 'Elênî (Helen: the Queen, who brought forth the wood of the Cross, and they (i.e. the king of Rômê) continued [to believe for] one hundred and thirty years.

And afterwards, Satan, who hath been the enemy of man from of old, rose up, and seduced the people of the country of Rômê, and they corrupted the Faith of Christ and they introduced heresy into the Church of God by the mouth of Nestorius And Nestorius, and Arius, and Yabâso (?) were those into whose hearts he cast the same jealousy as he had cast into the heart of Cain to slay his brother Abel. In like manner did their father the Devil, the enemy of righteousness and the hater of good, cast jealousy, even as David saith, 'They speak violence in the heights of heaven and set their mouths in the heavens, and their tongue wagget on the earth'.⁹⁰ And those same men who know not whence they came, and know not whither they are going, revile their Creator with their tongues, and blaspheme His glory, while He is God, the Word of the Lord. He came down from the throne of His Godhead, and put on the body of Adam, and He is God the Word. And in that body He was crucified so that He might redeem Adam in his iniquity and He went up into the heavens, and sat upon the throne of His Godhead in that body, which He had taken. And He shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and shall reward every man according to his work, for ever and ever. Amen.

And we believe thus and we adore the Holy Trinity. And those who do not believe thus are excommunicated by the Word of God, the King of Heaven and the earth, both in this world and in that world which is to come. And we are strong in the Orthodox Faith which the Fathers the Apostles have delivered unto us, the Faith of the Church. And thus Ethiopia continued to abide in her Faith until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."⁹¹

90. Psalm 73: 6-7.

91. W. Budge, *The Queen of Sheba*, pp. 164-165.

CHAPTER VIII

ETHIOPIA AND THE RISE OF ISLAM

1. First Contact

The rise of Islam was a turning point in world history. It deeply influenced and radically transformed the political, religious and social structures of countries in the Middle East. As Ethiopia is geographically located near the birthplace of Islam and is neighbour to Arabia, it is important to know of her relationship to Islam in the period of its infancy.

An Ethiopian Christian community existed in Mecca, the birthplace of Mohammad at that time and probably Mohammad enjoyed a friendly relationship with Ethiopian from his early childhood. According to Ibn Qutayba (+267/889), the nurse of Mohammad was an Ethiopian named Umm Ayman.¹ Another Arab writer, Baidawi, mentions that there were Ethiopian Christians in Mecca during the period before Mohammad received his call, and that they were conducting their services publicly and loudly. He specifically names Gabr and Yasara who used to read the Torah and the Gospel aloud and describes how Mohammad used to stop and listen to these two Christians.² These two points may explain Mohammad's detailed knowledge of Ethiopia at that time and his use of many Ge'ez words in the Koran. Generally, these words pertain to domestic life, diet, clothing and cosmetic articles, flora and fauna, commerce and communication, writing and building materials, handicrafts and art, Christian worship and administration. In all, they total over two hundred. Many, of course, are not pure Ge'ez, and some are Ge'ez loan words derived from other languages such as Greek and Syriac.³

When Mohammad began his mission in Mecca, he encountered many difficulties with the Quraysh who were responsible for the Kaba (holy shrine). He and his followers suffered persecution at the hands of these people, and for this reason he advised his followers to go to Ethiopia where there was "... a king under whom none are persecuted. It is a land of righteousness where God will give you relief from what you are suffering."

1. G. Lecomte, *Ibn Qutayba (+276/889) l'homme, son oeuvre, ses idées*, (Damas, 1965), p. 367.

2. G. Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, (New York, 1965), p. 161.

3. K. Ahrens, "Christliches im Qoran": *ZDMG* 84 (1930), pp. 15-68; 148-190; Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*, (Leipzig, 1909), Vol. II, p. 206; *Idem*, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, (Strassburg, 1910), p. 31 ff.; J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, (Berlin, 1897), p. 232; D.S. Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, (London, 1905), p. 96; A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, (Baroda, 1938), pp. 305-307; S. Fraenkel, *Die aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen*, (Leiden, 1886), p. 323.

4. J.S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, (London, 1954), p. 44; Ishaq's text is: "If you were to go to Abyssinia, (it would be better for you,) for the king will not tolerate injustice and it is a friendly country, until such time as Allah shall relieve you from your distress." Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammed*, trans. A. Guillaume, (Oxford, 1955), p. 146; Urwah Ibn al Zubayr in his letter to 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwan says: "Abyssinia was a market where the Quraysh traded, finding in it ample supplies, security and good business, so the Prophet asked them (his companions) to go there and most of them migrated there when they were persecuted at Mecca": as quoted by S. Q. Fatimi, "A new Light on the Hijrat to Habashah": *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, 9(1961), p. 114; G. Wiet, *L'Égypte arabe de la conquête arabe à la conquête ottomane 642-1517 de l'ère chrétienne*, *Histoire de la Nation y Égyptienne*, Vol. IV, (Paris, 1926), p. 10.

So the new converts began to immigrate from Arabia in the seventh month of the fifth year of Mohammad's call (c.615 A.D.).⁵ The first group consisted of twelve men and five women. Among them was Rockeya, the Prophet's daughter and her husband Othman, one of the earliest converts. Their leader, according to some Arab tradition, was Utman b. Mazun. They left Mecca in all secrecy to avoid detection by the Quraysh and travelled on horseback or on foot to the coast of the Red Sea. At the Bay of Sho'eiba—not far from Jeddah – they found two merchant-ships ready to depart for Ethiopia and they embarked after payment of half a dinar each.⁶

As soon as the Quraysh heard about their departure they sent an army unit in pursuit, but the soldiers reached the port after the Muslims had left. The immigrants arrived safely in Aksum where they were hospitably received by the king and the people. There they lived a quiet life. No one disturbed them because of their beliefs and they continued to practise their own religion in tranquillity.

After three months had elapsed, the immigrants in Ethiopia heard that the Quraysh had stopped persecuting the Muslims in Arabia following an agreement between the former and Mohammad. Moreover, it was said that the Muslims and pagans prayed around the Ka'ba together. Encouraged by this news, they decided to return home. But when they arrived in Mecca, they found that the situation had changed again. "Mohammad had withdrawn his concessions, and that Koreish had resumed their oppression."⁷ After consulting with one another, they decided to enter the city and if conditions grew worse, to return to Ethiopia. Fortunately, they found in Mecca friendly men who gave them protection.

The tolerant attitude of the Emperor of Ethiopia towards the Muslims, however, did not damage existing commercial relations with Mecca. In this connection, Ishaq states:

"While the apostle was in Mecca some twenty Christians came to him from Abyssinia when they heard news of him. They found him in the mosque and sat and talked with him, asking him questions, while some Qurayshites were in their meeting around the Ka'ba. When they had asked all the questions they wished the apostle invited them to come to God and read the Quran to them."⁸

These Christians were on a routine trading visit to Mecca and were moved to speak to Mohammad from curiosity. It is further affirmed that they indeed had been converted to Islam, and "believed what he said."

The favourable conditions under which the first immigrants lived in Aksum attracted more oppressed followers of Mohammad to Ethiopia. These migrations took place approximately at the beginning of the sixth year of Mohammad's mission. This second migration was continuous. At intervals, men, sometimes accompanied by their wives and children, crossed the Red Sea and arrived at Aksum. The leader of the second group was Ja'far b. Abu Talib, cousin of Mohammad. The total number of the immigrants to Ethiopia was 107: eighty-nine men and eighteen women.⁹ Among the women, eleven belonged to the Quraysh and seven were from other tribes. "They were safely ensconced there and were grateful for the protection of the Negus; could serve God without fear;

5. W.M. Watt, *Muhammad Prophet and Statesman*, (Oxford, 1961), p. 66; *Idem*, *Muhammad at Mecca*, (Oxford, 1953), pp. 58-59.

6. L. Caetani, *Annali dell'Islam*, (Milano, 1905), Vol. I, p. 273.

7. Sir W. Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, (Edinburgh, 1923), p. 86.

8. Ishaq, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

9. L. Caetani, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 276. There are serious doubts that two immigrations to Ethiopia occurred. W. M. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 110 ff.

and the Negus had shown them every hospitality."¹⁰ One of the immigrants Abdallah b. at Harith b. Qays b. Adiy b. Sa'd b. Sahn, composed the following poem which indicates the satisfaction of the Muslims with Ethiopia:

"O rider, take a message from me
To those who hope for the demonstration of God and religion,
To everyone of God's persecuted servants,
Mistreated and hard tried in Mecca's vale,
Namely, that we have found God's country spacious,
Giving security from humiliation, shame and low-repute,
So do not live a life in humiliation
And shame in death, not safe from blame
We have followed the apostle of God, and they
Have rejected the words of the prophet, and been deceitful
Visit thy punishment on the people who transgress
And protect me lest they rise and lead me astray."¹¹

When the Quraysh learned that the Muslim refugees had found peace and relief from persecution, they planned to discredit Islam by disrupting the harmonious relation: the immigrants had enjoyed in Ethiopia. To this end, they sent two representatives to Ethiopia, Abdallah b. Abu Rabiah and Amr b. Al-As b. Wa'il, who brought with them many gifts for the king, the bishops and other dignitaries. These two men were chosen particularly for their ability to negotiate with eloquence. They were given instructions from the Quraysh to persuade the king to expel the immigrants from Ethiopia and send them back to Arabia with the two ambassadors. In view of this, Abu Talib was inspired to compose the following verse for the Negus to move him to continue his generous hospitality to the immigrants:

"Would that I knew how far-away Ja'far and 'Amr fare,
(The bitterest enemies are oft the nearest in blood).
Does the Negus still treat Ja'far and his companions kindly,
Or has the mischief-maker prevented him?
Thou art noble and generous, mayst thou escape calamity;
No refugees are unhappy with thee.
Know that God has increased thy happiness
And all prosperity cleaves to thee.
Thou art a river whose banks overflow with bounty
Which reaches both friend and foe."¹²

In fact it was a petition to prolong their stay in Ethiopia.

When the envoys arrived in Aksum, they asked for an audience with the Emperor which they received. At the same time, they began distributing gifts among the nobles and generals and attempted to gain their support by saying: "Some foolish fellows from

10. Ishaq, *op. cit.*, p. 148. Muhammad Hamidullah states: "The refugees testify to the fact that they worshipped there according to their rites, and celebrated daily services, and nobody maltreated them nor abused them by unpleasant words." M. Hamidullah, "Muslim Conduct of State": *Islamic Culture*, pt. 2, 15 (1915), p. 182. The views of Margoliouth on this issue differ slightly: "Little is known of the condition of the refugees in Abyssinia. The bulk of our information is derived from the narrative of Umm Salamah, wife of Abdallah Ibn Abd al-Asad, who afterwards became wife of the Prophet. Some of the matter contained in this narrative is certainly afterthought; but the employment of some Ethiopic words in the speeches of the King of Abyssinia which she records, seems evidence of authenticity." D.S. Margoliouth, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

11. Ishaq, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-149.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

our people have taken refuge in the king's country. They have forsaken our religion and not accepted yours, but have brought in an invented religion which neither we nor you know anything about. Our nobles have sent us to the king to get him to return them, so when we speak to the king about them advise him to surrender them to us and not to speak to them...."¹³

Against the advice of his generals, the king convened his bishops who spread out their books around him, then before the bishops and the ambassadors from the Quraysh he questioned the refugees about their religion. First he inquired why they had abandoned the faith of their fathers. Ja'far b. Abu Talib answered:

"O King, we were a barbarous nation, worshipping idols, eating carrion, committing shameful deeds, killing our blood-relations, forgetting our duty towards our neighbours, the strong amongst us devouring the weak. Such was our state until God sent us an apostle, from amongst ourselves, with whose lineage, integrity, trustworthiness and purity of life we were acquainted. He summoned us to God, to believe in His unity, to worship Him and abandon the stones and idols which we and our fathers had worshipped in His stead. He commanded us to speak the truth, to be faithful in our trusts, to observe our duties to our kinsfolk and neighbours, to refrain from forbidden things and bloodshed, from committing immoralities and deceits, from consuming the property of orphans and from slandering virtuous women. He ordered us to worship God and associate no other with Him, to offer prayer, give alms and fast. (Then after enumerating the duties of Islam, he said): So we trusted in his word and followed the teachings he brought us from God... Wherefore our countrymen turned against us and persecuted us to try and seduce us from our faith, that we might abandon the worship of God and return to the worship of idols."¹⁴

On further questioning by the king on what they believed about Jesus Christ, Ja'far proceeded to quote some passages from the Qura'n about Jesus Christ: "Verily Christ Jesus, son of Mary, is the apostle of God and his word which he conveyed into Mary and a spirit proceeding from him."¹⁵ And when the Emperor asked him about Mary, he recited the Qura'n XIX, 16-34, which is copied from the Gospel of Luke, 1: 47-55: "And my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour...." When the Emperor heard that, he "wept so that his beard was wet with his tears, and his bishops wept with him, until their books were wet with their tears..... Then said the Negûsh to them, 'Verily this and that which Moses brought emanate from one Lamp, Go, for by Allâh I will not suffer them to get at you, nor even contemplate this.'"

The envoys returned to their country and in retaliation the Quraysh intensified the persecution of the Muslims and applied economic and social sanctions. This boycott had some effect.¹⁸ They (Quraysh) were to refuse to marry the daughters of those of

13. Ishaq, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

14. J.S. Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p.45. See also E. Schroeder, *Muhammad's People, A Tale by Anthology*, (The Bond Wheelwright Co., 1955), pp. 58-59.

15. Sura 4: 169.

16. E. Schroeder, *op. cit.*, p.61; E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, (Cambridge, 1929), Vol. I, pp. 187-188.

17. Ishaq, *op. cit.*, p. 152, L. Caetani, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 277.

18. I. Goldziher commenting on this fact states: "Islam had cause to be grateful to the black Ethiopians for the protection which their king had given to the first followers of the Prophet." *Muslim Studies*, (London, 1967), Vol. I, pp. 74-75.

the converts to Islam. "The refusal of the Negus to send back the refugees was also an unexpected rebuff to the wealthy merchants. As a result a meeting held by the notables, a new policy was introduced. Sanctions were to be imposed on the Messenger of God, and his near relatives."¹⁹

According to Arab sources, the emperor at that time was Ella-Seham.²⁰ However, Ethiopian sources refer to the king as Adriaz, who ruled the country for twenty years (603-623 A.D.). These dates coincide with the period of Mohammad, as confirmed by the following quotation: "At this time arose the infidel Mohammad in the East, occupied all countries, killed the magicians of Egypt, burned their books and came as far as Habab, the land of the Sudan. But he could not subdue the Empire of Ethiopia, for God kept it in His hands."²¹

Some information about this emperor can be derived from Arab sources. Arab writers mention two revolts in Ethiopia after the Muslim immigration: one in the provinces and the other in the capital city. The first occurred beyond the River Nile. There, a ruler had rebelled and the Emperor had decided to lead an expedition against him. The Muslims were concerned about the outcome of the war so a young man amongst them, Al-Zubayr b. Al-'Awwam, volunteered to accompany the Emperor in order to relay any news to his countrymen. After some days, he returned proclaiming: "Hurrah the Negus has conquered and God has destroyed his enemies and established him in his land."²²

The other revolt in the capital city stemmed from the presumed religious tendencies of the Emperor. Tabari mentions that the Emperor declared himself in favour of the new religion, but because the people ostensibly were opposed to the idea, he remained a secret follower of Mohammad. This statement by Tabari is an obvious expression of pure religious sentiment which can be regarded as wishful thinking.²³

The motives for the immigration of the followers of Mohammad have been interpreted in a number of ways. It has been said that the reason was: a) to avoid hardship and persecution in Mecca which could have damaged the mission of Mohammad; b) to avoid apostasy which could have decreased the number of his followers and c) to engage in trade which was essential for the success of Mohammad's mission, since trade in Mecca was controlled by the Quraysh and there was scant opportunity for the followers of Mohammad. Lastly, it has been suggested that they immigrated in order to secure military assistance from Aksum. However, from the results of the immigration, it is clear that the motives were religious and moral.²⁴

19. J.B. Glubb, *The Life and Times of Muhammad*, (New York, 1970), p. 125.

20. The name has many variations: Ashama, Asmaha, Sahama, Samaha, Asbeha. See Buhari al Makki, *Buntes Prachtgewand, ueber die guten Eigenschaften der Abessinier*, trans. Max Weisweiler, I. Teil, (Hannover, 1924), p. 49; M. Hartmann, "Der Nagasi, Ashama und sein Sohn Arma": *ZDMG* 49 (1895), pp. 299-300; Ishaq, *op. cit.*, p. 657; L. Caetani, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 736.

21. *Ethiopian Chronicle*, an unpublished MS., the property of Qese Gebez Tekle Haimanot of Aksum, p. 63. The Emperor's son Girma, whose throne name was Asfer, succeeded him and reigned for fifteen years (E.C. 623-638). The dates given for Ella-Seham and his son are only approximate and they correspond to the Ethiopian calendar which is about eight years behind.

22. Ishaq, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

23. Tabari, *Chronique*, Vol. II, p. 421.

24. W.M. Watt, *Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman*, pp. 67-68. The same author in his other work, *Muhammad at Mecca*, p. 113 discusses in detail the various reasons for the immigration to Ethiopia. In fact he enumerates five such reasons.

2. The Emperor of Aksum and Mohammad

While Mohammad was in Medina he despatched an ambassador to the Emperor of Ethiopia to request the return of his followers. The Emperor approved of the return and placed two ships at the disposal of the immigrants. Sixteen embarked and arrived safely in Medina. The rest remained behind to enjoy the hospitality of the Negus.²⁵

The Emperor was also requested to betroth Mohammad to Umm Habibah, the daughter of Abu Sufyan. As her former husband, Abed Allah, had been converted to Christianity in Ethiopia, she had refused to live with him and had finally divorced him. Here we have a reference to the first Muslim converts to Christianity from Arabia. During the same period, there appeared the first converts from Christianity to Islam in Ethiopia. One example was Bilal, an Ethiopian, who became the first Muezzin (a man who calls the faithful to prayer).²⁶

The Emperor performed the marriage ceremony and then gave Umm Habibah 400 dinars (£220) as her dowry,²⁷ delivered her to Ja'far and sent the party back to Arabia laden with gifts for Mohammad. Tabari recounts the quality and number of these gifts. They consisted of vestments of fine quality, arms, slaves, two mules with saddles and finally two Christian girls, one called Mary and the other Akbar. The latter was given by Mohammad to his poet Hasan, son of Thâbit, while the former he retained for himself.²⁸ The party arrived safely at the port of Jar, probably near modern Yenbo, about a day's journey from Medina. They were called "the People of the Ship" and their arrival coincided with the victory of the Muslims at Kheiber in 628 A.D.²⁹

Habibah remained one of the beloved wives of Mohammad until the end of his life. It was she to gether with Umm Selama who had also been to Ethiopia, described the wonders of the Christian church at Aksum to the Prophet on his deathbed. Their elaborate and colourful description of the Cathedral of St. Mary, which included reference to the interior walls on which were painted wonderful pictures of the Saints, actually did not please the Prophet.³⁰

25. Tabari, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 421; D.S. Margoliouth, *op. cit.*, p. 363.

26. He was among the first converts to Islam and remained faithful to his new religion despite constant torture. His master, who disapproved of his conversion, used to take him out in the hottest part of the day and throw him on his back naked on the sand. Placing a large rock on his chest, he would threaten him saying: "You will stay till you die or deny Muhammad". Bilal, however, continued to believe in Islam and used to say, "One, One", thus expressing the unity of God which is the very basis of Islam. Mohammad used to refer to him proudly as "the first fruit of Abyssinia". Later he played an outstanding role in the political, military and social life of Arabia. (Hassan Ibrahim Hassan, *Islam, a Religious, Political, Social and Economic Study*, (Baghdad, 1967), p. 42. Because of the service Bilal rendered to Islam, the job of calling the believers to prayer was later assigned to an Ethiopian. "The Khalifah shall be of the Quraysh, judicial authority shall be in the hands of the Auxiliaries and the call to prayer with the Abyssinians". (Sir T.W. Arnold, *The Caliphate*, (London, 1965), p. 47).

27. Al-Mas'udi, *Le livre de l'avertissement et de la revision*, trans. B. Carra de Vaux, (Paris, 1896), p. 340.

28. Tabari, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 424.

29. Sulaiman Nadavi, "Arab Navigation": *Islamic Culture*, 15 (1941), pp. 444-445.

30. Sir W. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, (Edinburgh, 1923) p. 490. The description of Umm Habibah and Umm Selama contains two items of considerable historical significance. In the first place it gives a short but vivid picture of the first church of St. Mary at Aksum, which was, according to Ethiopian tradition, built by the twin brothers, Abreha and Asbeha, the Christian emperors of Ethiopia in the fourth century. As far as we know, this is the oldest source referring to Aksum cathedral which was destroyed by bellicose hordes in the tenth century. Of further importance is the description of the paintings in the cathedral which has significance in assisting us to evaluate the nature of Christian life as well as Christian art in Ethiopia in the seventh century. One conclusion drawn from this evidence is that Ethiopian Christians used icons in the church even before the seventh century. At the same time, it testifies that the historical roots of Ethiopian Christian art go as far back as the sixth century at least.

The marriage of Mohammad to Umm Habibah had a double political motive. On the one hand, he had to strengthen his friendship with the Ethiopian Emperor who was protector of his followers; on the other, he hoped to attract his main opponent, Abu Sufyan, to his own religion. It seems that he succeeded in both cases. In particular, Abu Sufyan was converted to Islam after the marriage of his daughter to Mohammad. There is no doubt that the conversion of such an influential man resulted in a change in attitude towards Islam and paved the way for the success of the Prophet.

Generally speaking these in exile in Ethiopia were well treated and fairly compensated. Al-Baladhuri mentions that both these immigrants and the Muslim fighters of Badr, and Uhud received 4,000 dirhams each.³¹

After the return of the immigrants Mohammad continued to maintain links with Ethiopia.³² Among the gifts brought back with Umm Habibah was an Ethiopian girl whom he took into his harem. "Of the maidens one was called Maria; and by her the Prophet had a son, Ibrahim, or Abraham, who died at the age of two years."³³ Mohammad had a special affection for her. "In the person of Mary, an Abyssinian slave, they [the wives] found a dangerous rival, they could endure it no longer, and Mohammed, to appease them, made a solemn promise to keep himself hence forward away and apart from her."³⁴

In Hadith it is stated that Mohammad received a *mustaq* (a long-sleeved garment of fur and silk brocade) from the Byzantine Emperor. He tried it on and realized it was too long for him. He sent it to Ja'far who put it on and appeared before the Prophet. Then Mohammad said, "I did not give it for you to wear it." Ja'far inquired what he should do with it. The Prophet answered: "Send it to your brother the Najashi."³⁵

Mohammad's connections with Ethiopia, however, existed on a more significant level than gift-giving alone. His entourage included a good number of Ethiopians, particularly soldiers.³⁶ In his daily conversation occasionally he used Ethiopic words,³⁷ and whenever he felt unhappy he used to entertain the Ethiopian delegation in a special house, known as the Guest's House.³⁸ The ring he wore and the seal, inscribed with the words "Mohammad, the Prophet of God", were both of Ethiopian stone.³⁹ At the last moment of his life, when he lost consciousness, an Ethiopian drug was placed in his mouth.⁴⁰

31. Jâbir al Baladhuri, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, trans. F.C. Murgotten, (Columbia, 1924) pt. II, p. 251

32. Once, it is related, an Ethiopian entered the Prophet's room and said: "You Arabs excel us in all matters, you are of finer build, more pleasing colour, and God has honoured you by rousing the Prophet amongst you. What do you think: if I believe in you and your mission, will I find a place in paradise with the believing Arabs?" "Yes certainly", replied the Prophet. So the answer of the Prophet to this question was positive. (I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, p. 75).

33. E. Schroeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-114.

34. S. Khuda Bukhsh, *A History of the Islamic Peoples*, (Calcutta, 1914), p. 17.

35. A. Jeffery, *A Reader on Islam*, (The Hague, 1962), pp. 129-130.

36. "One day I saw the Messenger of Allah, at the door of my apartment, and the Abyssinians were sporting in the mosque. . . ." (Muhammad Ali, *A Manual of Hadith*, (Lahore, no date), p. 79; R.D. Osborn, *Islam under the Khalifs of Baghdad*, (London, 1878), p. 62). According to Ali b. Burhan al-Din al-Halabi al-Shaffii, this occasion is connected with the arrival of the Prophet in Medina: "The Abyssinians made a play with their spears, (. . .) out of pleasure at the Apostle of God". R.B. Serjeant, "South Arabia and Ethiopia-African Elements in the South Arabian Population": *PICES* (Addis Ababa, 1966), p. 26.

37. "Il (le Prophète) lui dit: 'Omm-Kahlid, ceci est senah' 'Senah' en Abyssinien signifie 'beau'." (El Bokhari, *Les traditions islamiques*, trans. O. Houdas, (Paris, 1914), Vol. VI, p. 104; A. Jeffery, *op. cit.*, p. 251).

38. Muhammad Hamidullah, "Muslim Conduct of State": *Islamic Culture*, pt. II, 15 (1941), p. 202.

39. "The ring of the Apostle of Allah was of silver and its seal was Abyssinian stone". Ahmed Ibn Jâbir al Balâdhuri, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, p. 256; D.S. Margoliouth, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

40. D.S. Margoliouth, *op. cit.*, p. 468.

In 630 A.D., when Mohammad was informed of the death of Ella Seham, the Emperor of Ethiopia, he mourned and prayed for the repose of his soul.⁴¹ But his relations with the Ahabis of Mecca were far from friendly. The Ethiopian soldiers who were subjects of the rulers of Mecca fought against Mohammad and the enmity was reciprocated. In the battle of Uhud the Ethiopians played a major role in defeating the Muslims. One Ethiopian soldier, for example, was offered an attractive reward by Hind, wife of Abu Sufyan, to kill the uncle of Mohammad, named Hamza. The soldier appeared in the front line where he saw Hamza engaged in fighting. "He threw his javelin, and struck him low down in the belly."⁴² He struck him for a second time, fatally wounding him. Mohammad wept much at the death of his uncle as Hamza was young and unmarried. In this war Mohammad himself was wounded and broke two of his front teeth.⁴³

As a further indication of the involvement of Ethiopians, before the battle of Badr a small group from Mecca was selected to infiltrate the Muslim ranks and collect information about the movements of Mohammad. Among these was an Ethiopian soldier named Aridh Abou-Yasâr. The group was intercepted by Ali and the Ethiopian was taken prisoner.⁴⁴

In 627 A.D. a combined force of the Ahabis and other Arab tribes, about 10,000 strong, marched to attack Medina. This episode is remembered in the Qu'ran as 'The War of the Trench' or '*Khandaq*'.⁴⁵ But this misunderstanding was eclipsed by the sensational news of the conversion of the Ethiopian Emperor to Islam. In the sixth year of the Flight (628 A.D.), Mohammad sent eight messengers to eight rulers—six princes and three emperors: to the princes of Yemen, of Umâm, of Yamâmah, of Bahrain, and to Alttarith, prince of Saracens on the borders of Syria, to George (wrongly called Mukankas), Governor of Alexandria and Viceroy of Egypt, and to the Emperor of Ethiopia,⁴⁶ to Chosroes, Emperor of Persia, and to Heraclius, Emperor of the Romans. From the princes, Mohammad received two positive replies: Yamamah and Bahrain decided to declare their allegiance to Islam. Yemen and Umam sent negative replies which Mohammad received with curses, while the Governor of Egypt replied with politeness and promised to consider the matter after thoughtful study. From the three emperors: the Persian rejected unconditionally the request of Mohammad, Heraclius took the same position as the Governor of Egypt while, surprisingly, the Emperor of Ethiopia answered Mohammad's letter very favourably, alleging that he submitted to Islam.⁴⁷ The letters, according to Tabari,

41. "Au mois de redjeb de la neuvième année, mourut le Nedjâschî d'Abyssinie. Le Prophète, averti par Gabriel, annonça cet événement à ses compagnons et pria sur ce prince à Médine". Tabari, *op. cit.*, Vol III, p. 177; S. Trimmingham, *op. cit.*, p. 46; D.S. Margoliouth, *op. cit.*, p. 443. It is interesting to note that in *Futuh al Habasha* mention is made of the tomb of la Habash near Wugro in Tigré and this person is identified with Ella-Seham: "L'imâm partit du Tambèn avec ses compagnons, empressés comme l'eau courante; le second jour, il arriva près du tombeau d'Ahmed en-Nedjâchi qui vivait au temps du Prophète (que Dieu le bénisse et le sauve!). Les Musulmans se dirent: 'Nous visiterons aujourd'hui Ashamat en-Nadjâchi et demain, nous irons combattre.' L'imâm reprit: 'Aujourd'hui, nous avons une affaire sérieuse; demain, nous visiterons le tombeau. (Chihab ed-Din, *Histoire de la conquête de l'Abyssinie*, trans. R. Basset, (Paris, 1897-1901), pp. 419-420; C. Conti Rossini, "Necropoli musulmana ed antica chiesa cristiana presso Ugri Haribâ nell' Enderta": *RSO* 17 (1938), p. 402).

42. E. Schroeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 96-97.

44. Tabari, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 495.

45. H. Lammens, *Islam. Beliefs and Institutions*, trans. Sir E.D. Ross, (London, 1929), p. 30.

46. Tabari in his *Chronicle* mentions the name of the Ethiopian Emperor Al-Adhkhâm (*Chronique* Vol III., p. 95). Apparently it is a corrupt form of Ella Seham.

47. A.J. Butler, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt*, (Oxford, 1902), pp. 140-141; E. Schroeder, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

which were exchanged between the Ethiopian Emperor and Mohammad were as follows
 "In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate. Mohammad, the Apostle of God, to Negashi Ashama (Ella Saham(?), son of Ella Gabaz), King of Abyssinia [sends] greeting. Glory be to God, the Only One, the Holy One, the peaceful and faithful Protector. I testify that Jesus, the son of Mary, is the spirit and Word of God and that He sent them down into Mary, the blessed and immaculate Virgin, and she conceived. He created Jesus of His own spirit and made Him to live by His breath, even as he did Adam. I now summon thee to worship the One God, Who is without counterpart (or partner), and Who rules the heavens and the earth. Accept my mission, follow me, and become one of my disciples, for I am the Apostle of God. I have sent Ja'far and other believers into thy country; protect them and supply their needs. Set aside the pride of thy sovereignty. I call upon thee and thy hosts to accept the worship of the supreme Being. My mission is over. I have preached, and may heaven grant that my counsels may be of benefit to those who hear. Peace shall be with the man who shall walk in the light of the True Belief."⁴⁸

On receiving this letter, the Emperor laid it on his head and eyes as a mark of deep respect; then he left the throne and seated himself on the ground and said the *shahada* or testimony. Subsequently, he despatched the following alleged letter in reply:

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. To Mohammad, the Apostle of God, King 'Arman [sends] greeting. Peace be unto thee, O Apostle of God. May He shelter thee under His compassion and give thee blessings in abundance. There is no god but Allah, Who has brought me to Islam. Thy letter I have read, O Prophet. What thou hast said about Jesus is the right belief, for he hath said nothing more than that. I testify my belief in the King of heaven and of earth. Thy advice I have pondered over deeply. Ja'far and his company have been received with the honour due to them in my country and have been entreated hospitably. I testify that thou art the Apostle of God, and I have sworn this in the presence of Ja'far, and have acknowledged Islam before him. I attach myself to the worship of the Lord of the Worlds, O Prophet. I send my son Area as my envoy to thee, but if thou dost command it, I will go myself and do homage to the holiness of thy mission. I testify that thy words are true."⁴⁹

48. W. Budge, *A History of Ethiopia*, Vol. I, pp. 271-272. There is another version of this letter translated by D.M. Dunlop, "Another Prophetic Letter," *JRAS*, 1940, pp. 55-56: In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, from Mohammed the apostle of God, to the Negu/s, the great one of Abyssinia, peace (be) upon him/that follows the guidance. To continue, I praise unto/thee God, beside Whom there is no god, the King, the Holy, the Peace, the Faithful, the Watcher, and I bear witness that Jesus son of Mary (is) the breath / of God and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, the virg/n, the good, the chaste and she bore Jesus by His b/reath, and He breathed on him as He created Adam with His hand, And / I summon thee to God, Who is One and hath no fel/low, and help (depends) on submitting to Him. And if/ thou obeyest me and believest in what has come to me (it is well), for I am the a/postle of God. And I summon thee and thy ho/sts to God to Whom belongs glory and power. And I have inform/ed and warned (thee), and do you (all) receive my warnings, and peace/(be) upon him that follows the Guidance.

49. W. Budge, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 272. Cf. Tabari, *Chronique*, Vol. III, p. 95. *Berhannina Selam*, a monthly review which was to be published in Addis Ababa, had an interesting item in its issue of Meskerem 13, 1924 E.C. in connection with the Negus' letter to Mohammad. In fact it was taken from *Al Ahram*, March 13, 1931. The correspondent of this newspaper had despatched a cable from Beirut in which he mentioned that he had met a certain Salem, son of Sultan Abdelhamid, who claimed that he possessed the letter of the Negus of Ethiopia to Mohammad which had been given to him as a wedding present from his father.

The authenticity of this letter is doubtful as there is not sufficient ground to believe that the Emperor of Ethiopia denied the Christian faith and submitted himself to Islam. If we look at the question from a religious point of view, Islam was in its infancy and had not yet developed to the point of attracting important personalities like the Emperor of Ethiopia. The recitation of Ja'far, moreover, contains nothing new and is, more or less, a repetition of Biblical teachings accompanied by a promise of a superior spiritual life which Islam could provide. "I now summon thee to worship the One God, Who is without counterpart, and Who rules the heavens and the earth." This sentence would not convey anything new to an Ethiopian Christian or to an Emperor whose ancestors and he himself, believed in the Lord of Heaven and Earth. Politically, Islam had not yet acquired the power to impose its own ideas on other people nor was it yet in a position to offer any kind of assistance. (This is important to remember in the light of the argument that the Ethiopian Emperor was persuaded into this submission in order to restore the lost territory in South Arabia by securing the help of Mohammad.) Furthermore, in economic terms this conversion could not have produced any benefits. We possess some coins of Armah, immediate successor of Ella Seham, with unvocalized Ethiopian legends: one side reads ገገሥ ሐርማሕ : "King Armah", and on the reverse side ፍሥሐ ለይዘን ለሕዝብ : "Gladness let there be to the peoples." But the interesting point here is that on the reverse he uses a cross which is a Christian symbol. This demonstrably refutes the claim of the conversion of Armah to Islam. That Armah was a peaceful man can be seen from his motto. In this context, W. Budge states: "When we remember the ardent and fanatical character of Abyssinian Christianity it must come as a surprise that Armah and his bishops accepted Islam."⁵⁰ A. Butler is also of a similar opinion. He comments that Ethiopia "to-day remains the one power which has never bowed the knee to Islam."⁵¹

Thus the alleged conversion was a form of publicity for the new religion, designed to gain more followers on the Arabian peninsula and from other neighbouring countries. This becomes more obvious if we look at the painting which adorned the palace of Al-Walid (705-715 A.D.) at Qusair 'Amra in Transjordan. The Emperor of Ethiopia is pictured among the rulers subjected by the Muslims. The others were Caesar, Chosroes, and Roderick the last Visigothic King of Spain.⁵² In any event, Ethiopia and Arabia remained on friendly terms and consequently Ethiopia was exempted from the Jihads. In Arab tradition it is reported that Mohammad himself prohibited Jihads against Ethiopia. "Leave the Abyssinians in peace, so long as they do not take the offensive."⁵³ There are a number of reasons for this exemption. In the first place, it was an acknowledgement of the moral and material support given by the Ethiopian Emperor and of his treatment of the immigrants. Secondly, the prolonged Ethiopian occupation of South Arabia had left a deep impression on the inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula. The expedition of Abreha against Mecca is especially remembered by the Arabs.⁵⁴ Probably Mohammad did not want to risk a war with an empire like the Aksumite one which was very powerful and prosper-

ous and possessed superior military strength.⁵⁵ For whatever reasons, it is a fact that Ethiopia remained outside the range of Islamic expansion. Progressive Muslims developed two theories about the relations of Islam with the rest of the world beyond its sphere of influence. One is called *dar al-ahd* (world of the Covenant) the other *dar al-hiyad* (world of neutrality). In the case of Ethiopia, as there was no definite agreement with Islam, she belongs to the *dar al-hiyad*. For conservative Muslims there is no other world except that of *dar al-Islam* (world of Islam).⁵⁶

At this point one may question whether Ethiopia gained anything from this exemption. On this matter there are conflicting arguments. Exemption from war provided Ethiopia with the possibility of preserving her own civilization which had developed mainly through contact with the Graeco-Roman world. It also prevented the bloodshed which other Middle East countries suffered. But aside from that it cannot be said that exemption had any beneficial effects. Communication by sea with the external world was interrupted after the expansion of Islam thus producing serious cultural and economic repercussions. Following the introduction of Christianity, the culture of Ethiopia had been closely linked with that of the Mediterranean world. As was mentioned previously, Christianity profoundly affected the lives of Ethiopians and, in fact, it had become the stimulus to Ethiopia in general. Now, by the expansion of Islam, Christian influences from the Mediterranean and relations with the rest of the Christian world ceased. As a result the culture of Ethiopia remained static and the only advantage of the exemption to Ethiopia was the preservation of the cultural heritage of the past. However, if we examine closely the consequences of the exemption we find that it existed in theory rather than in practice.

It is believed that Mohammad gave strict orders to his followers not to attack Ethiopia directly. But it is doubtful whether the Muslims themselves respected the letter and spirit of this order.⁵⁷ They did not actually threaten the country by direct and immediate war, but the barriers which they raised between Ethiopia and the outside world were as harmful as a Jihad. Thus from the time of Islamic expansion development of culture in Ethiopia ceased. There is no doubt that spiritual aggression is worse than military penetration and as a result the country deteriorated both culturally and morally.

From an economic point of view, the country also suffered greatly. She was no longer in control of the whole of the Red Sea which was the key to her external commercial activities. There were no longer any commercial connections with the Mediterranean world or with the East. The Arab presence limited the naval activities of the Aksumites and later some of their ships were definitely destroyed. From that period economic life began to decline and the country became isolated from the rest of the world.

One of the first events contributing to this decline occurred towards the end of Mohammad's life. Around 631 A.D. (9 A.H.), Mohammad ordered his first admiral Alkamah ibn Mujazziz from the family of Mudlijite, to chase the Ethiopians from the coast of Jedolah (Shoeiba) which they had occupied for commercial purposes. Alkamah was successful⁵⁸, this led to a diminishing of the commercial activities of the

50. W. Budge, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

51. A. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

52. J.S. Trimingham, *op. cit.*, p. 46, n. 4.

53. *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 46. According to some Arab writers this tradition is associated with the Qu'ran 6, 85-86. See Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, (The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1955), p. 257, where he states: "the Qu'ranic verses about the Christians (Q. VI, 85-6), which put them in favorable light in the eyes of the Muslims, were specific references to the Abyssinians with whom Muhammad's early followers were associated."

54. In Mecca, even today, a small boy can relate vividly the expedition of Abreha.

55. On this point, the opinion of Hurani differs slightly: "The Prophet may well have written to the Negus of Abyssinia demanding his submission to Islam; but he had not the means in shipping to enforce his demand. There were of course other reasons why the Moslems took a northward direction. The Byzantine and Sassanid Empires were far more worth conquering in every respect than the poor kingdom of Axum" G.F. Hurani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, (Princeton, 1951), p. 46.

56. Majid Khadduri, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

57. Majid Khadduri states: "Malik was not sure as to the genuineness of this hadith, he advised abiding by it, adding that the Muslims had habitually refrained from attacking Ethiopia." *op. cit.*, p. 257.

58. Mohammad Hamidullah, *Le Prophète de l'Islam*, 2 Vols., (Paris, 1959), Vol. I, p. 290.

Aksumites in Mecca. But this measure did not curb completely the initiative of the Ethiopians for it seems that they continued to trade with Jedolah in one way or another.

3. Aksum and the Successors of Mohammad

The immediate successor of Mohammad, Abu Beker, was absorbed by internal matters and had little time to deal with the Ethiopians. A certain false prophet, Musalima, had proclaimed himself prophet in Yemen and had rallied many people behind him. Abu Beker was forced to wage war with him to assert his authority and in one of the fierce battles which followed, Wahshi, the Ethiopian who had killed the uncle of Mohammad, killed Musalima.⁵⁹ However such internal problems did not confront the founder of the Islamic Empire, Califa Umar ibn Khattab who decided to take more severe measures against the Ethiopians. He sent an expeditionary force by ship under the previously mentioned admiral, Alkamah, but suffered a defeat so disastrous in 640 A.D. that it took a considerable time to rebuild Islamic naval power.⁶⁰ Obviously the expedition was directed against Adulis, the maritime centre of Ethiopia, but it is improbable that Adulis was sacked and that it declined in importance as a result of this expedition.

Umar also turned his attention to those Ethiopians living in Arabia. Apparently in the cities there were numerous Ethiopian Christians who were engaged in trade and handicrafts. As they were aliens and non-Muslims they were heavily taxed.⁶¹ There was, for instance, the case of Moghira ibn Schoba Firouz Abou Loulou in Medina⁶². He was a carpenter by profession and was obliged to pay two dirhems daily. He therefore appeared before Umar with a complaint about the burden of his tax and asked for some relief. Umar enquired as to how much he paid and what profession he practised. Moghira replied that the tax was two dirhems a day and that he was a carpenter, designer, engraver and smith and that he knew how to build windmills. Since he had all these skills, Umar considered that the tax was not high. Abou Loulou, left with no alternative but force, planned to assassinate the Caliph with an Ethiopian two-edged knife. One day while Umar was in the mosque, Abou Loulou approached him and stabbed him six times in the arms and stomach. A few hours later the Caliph died.⁶³ Firouz Abou Loulou was himself caught and killed with the same knife by somebody from the tribe of Temim.⁶⁴

After this bloody episode it seems that conditions for Ethiopians in Arabia improved. At least from sources so far available, we do not hear of any massive retaliatory measures against the Ethiopians residing in Arabia. In later times we find that Ethiopians were recruited into the army⁶⁵ and that some of them were allowed to work as artisans and technicians.⁶⁶

59. E. Schroeder, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

60. Some believe that the vessels were wrecked at sea and so the whole naval force vanished. W. Muir, *The Caliphate; Its Rise, Decline, and Fall*, (Edinburgh, 1924), p. 640; *Idem, Annals of the Early Caliphate* (London, 1883), pp. 265-266; Yusuf Fadl Hasan, *The Arabs and the Sudan*, (Edinburgh, 1967), p. 30.

61. Already during the time of Mohammad relations between Muslims and Christians had been defined: "If a man cling to his Judaism or Christianity, he shall not be forced from it, but he shall pay the Tribute: a gold dinar of full weight for every grown man or woman, free or slave." Mohammad in his letter addressed to the Yemenites. (E. Schroeder, *op. cit.*, p. 133.)

62. Erroneously, Muir regards him as a Persian. *Annals of the Early Caliphate*, p. 278. Tabari is specific in stating that he was an Abyssinian. "Ce Firouz était un esclave abyssin et chrétien". (*Chronique*, Vol. III, p. 528).

63. Tabari, *Chronique*, Vol. III, p. 556.

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 27.

66. *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 56-57.

4. Contact with Christian Countries

Although the sea route had not yet fallen wholly into Muslim hands, the land route to Egypt via Nubia presumably became the one most frequently used. Apparently the Ethiopian delegates to the Patriarch of Alexandria, (Benjamin, 620-665 A.D.) used the overland route when they sought to petition him for a new Metropolitan for the See of Aksum which had remained vacant for a long time. Benjamin selected a man named Cyril and consecrated him Metropolitan. He is considered the twenty-fourth Prelate of Ethiopia since the time of Frumentius.⁶⁷ It is also the first occasion that there is a clear indication, in the Coptic sources, of the consecration of a Metropolitan to Ethiopia. Perhaps it may be necessary to point out that a single individual was designated responsible for the whole Christian community of Ethiopia and was so ordained. Because of the lack of a Metropolitan, the Ethiopian church took provisional measures to ensure a sufficient number of clergy. Young boys were consecrated as deacons in their early teens and priests immediately after their marriage. Depending on age, requirements for the priesthood were relaxed, as was the reading of religious books and the recitation of certain prayers. To occupy the clergy fully, it was expected that a minimum of two priests and three deacons attended each service. In time this custom acquired legal validity. The early consecration of the clergy, a unique aspect of church life, was tacitly accepted by the Metropolitan who continued to ordain more priests and deacons than the church required. For Ethiopians, of course, it was the only practical method of ensuring the preservation of the Christian religion.

While Ethiopia re-established religious connections with Egypt, political relations between the two countries were not so cordial, if we can believe some Arab writers. It is mentioned that in 652 A.D. the Governor of Egypt invaded Ethiopian territory. Although the reason for this war is not discussed, it can be assumed that, like Mecca, Egypt was motivated by economic considerations as Ethiopia was commercially active not only along the west coast of the Red Sea but also within Egypt itself.

The religious and political life of Nubia at this time appeared to be subject to considerable influence from Ethiopia. This we infer from the war which broke out between the Aksumites and the inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom, Mekuriah. As was mentioned earlier, in the sixth century when Christianity was introduced into Nubia, this kingdom remained Melkite while the others became Jacobite. The tension between the two factions had eventually led to war. In the meantime, Egypt had been subdued by Islam and division and disunity left Nubia vulnerable. Cooperation was the theme of the letter of the Patriarch of Alexandria, Isaac (686-689) addressed to the Aksumites and to Mekuriah. The complete letter has not come to light, only a summary of it is found in the history of the Patriarch of Alexandria. "In those days, the Patriarch addressed letters to the king of the Abyssinians and the king of the Nubians, bidding them make peace together and praying that there might be no ill will between them; and he wrote this on account of a dispute which there was between the two. Thereupon certain intriguers seized the opportunity of slandering Abba Isaac before Abd al-Aziz, who was greatly incensed, and sent his officers to bring him that he might put him to death. But the secretaries wrote letters differing from the patriarch's letters, and gave them to the messengers whom he had sent to

67. J.M. Neale, *A History of the Holy Eastern Church. The Patriarchate of Alexandria*, 2 V. (London, 1842), Vol. II, p. 74; O. Meinardus, "A Brief History of the Abunates of Ethiopia": *Wiener Zeitschrift fuer die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 58, (1962), p. 42.

68. L. Caetani, *Chronographia islamica*, (Roma, 1912), fasc. 2, p. 340.

Abyssinians, and took those first letters from them, in fear for the patriarch."⁶⁹

Presumably the war continued between the rival factions until the Anti-Chalcedonian group defeated the opposition and imposed its doctrinal teachings on the other.

Towards the end of the seventh century the See of Aksum again fell vacant. A priest was sent to Alexandria to request a new Metropolitan. This envoy was described as an "Indian" and at the same time belonging to a kingdom independent of Islamic influence.⁷⁰ The fact that India was not under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Alexandria and that Ethiopia was sometimes confused with India substantiates the claim that the envoy was an Ethiopian. The story is related thus:

After this there came a priest from the people of the Indians to *Abba Simon*, [692–700 A.D.] to ask of him that he would ordain for him a bishop for the Indians. Now the people of the Indians were not subjects of the Muslims. So the patriarch said to the Indian priest: 'I cannot ordain a bishop for you without the command of the Amir, who is governor of the land of Egypt. Go to him, and make thy need known to him. Then, if he bids me, I will do for thee what thou requirest, and thou shalt return in peace to thy country with companions.' So the priest went from the patriarch's house to go to the Amir. Then some of the Gaianites met him, and took him to Theodore, the chief of the Phantasiasts, and told Theodore the cause which had brought the priest from his country. Therefore Theodore said to him: 'I will do what thou needest for thee.' Then Theodore took a man of Maryūt, and ordained him bishop for him, and ordained two priests for him, and sent them away secretly to India. But after they had travelled twenty days, the guardians of the roads, who were employed by the Muslims, seized them, and sent them to the caliph, whose name was Abd al-Malik. The Indian priest, however, escaped, and returned to Egypt; but they brought the three others bound to Abd al-Malik. And when the caliph knew that they were of the land of Egypt, and from Maryūt, and were travelling to a foreign country, he cut off their hands and feet, which he sent to Egypt, to Abd al-Aziz, to whom he wrote, reproaching him with incapacity, and saying: 'It seems that thou knowest not what takes place in thine own country, namely that the patriarch of the Christians, who lives at Alexandria has sent information of the affairs of Egypt to India. Now, when thou readest this letter, thou must inflict upon him two hundred stripes, and take from him one hundred thousand dinars, and send the money to us forthwith by the envoys who come to thee, without delay.'⁷¹

This message became a source of trouble to the Patriarch. He was summoned during the night to the court and questioned about the alleged appointment of a bishop for the Indians. The Patriarch categorically denied the allegation. He had not, however, concealed the fact that a priest had appeared to him and asked for a bishop and he had sent the man to him (the Caliph) to get permission. Fortunately that priest was in Egypt and the Patriarch presented him to the Caliph, "... the Indian priest, who made known to him all that had happened and that Simon was innocent of this occurrence. When the Amir learnt this, he sent the Indian to prison, and commanded that Theodore should be taken and crucified. And he thanked the holy man, Simon the patriarch, and rejoiced over him, and acknowledged his honesty. He wrote

69. "History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria", ed. and trans. B. Evetts: *Patrologia Orientalis*, Vol. V, p. 24.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 36; cf. J.A. Neale, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 88–89.

71. *Patr. Orientalis*, *op. cit.*, p. 36–37.

also to Abd al-Malik, his brother, to inform him of what had happened and that the patriarch of the Christians in the city of Alexandria had nothing to do with this matter, but was innocent of it; and he praised him to the caliph, and recounted his goodness and uprightness and chastity. And Abd al-Aziz performed for Abba Simon what he had promised, by sparing for his sake Theodore and the Indian priest; for he had learnt that there was no deceit in him."⁷²

5. War and Trade

At the beginning of the eighth century Ethiopia found herself involved in both offensive and defensive wars. Relations with the Umayyad Caliphate of Yemen were from friendly and both sides had initiated hostilities. The measures taken by Caliph Umar in the previous century had not diminished the Ethiopian presence in the Red Sea basin and along the Arabian coasts. In 702 A.D. an Ethiopian force⁷³ invaded Jeddah and inflicted serious damage before marching on to Mecca.⁷⁴ But there they were repulsed. In the same year the Umayyad Caliph, Sulayman b. Abd al-Malik attacked Ethiopian territory and occupied Dahlak,⁷⁵ which was used as a prison for the opponents of the Caliph.⁷⁶ In spite of this occupation, the evidence from Arab sources indicates that Ethiopians continued their activities in the Red Sea and in 768 A.D. they attempted another attack on Jeddah. Abu Ja'far al-Manṣūr sent an army unit to repel the attack.

The occupation of Dahlak seems to have been a defensive one as there appears to have been no attempt made to occupy the mainland. From the fact that, in 750 A.D. the Ethiopians refused to shelter the two sons of Merwan,⁷⁸ we can infer that the coastal region of the Aksumite territory was under Ethiopian control. The whole matter of attack and counter-attack therefore had economic rather than political implications. The aim was to secure markets for their goods. Otherwise it is difficult to believe that by the attack on Jeddah the Ethiopians hoped to regain their lost overseas territory. Nor do the activities of the Caliphate of Yemen, on the other hand, give the impression that the aim was to expand its empire in northeast Africa by means of the Jihad.

This belligerency does not seem to have made much impact on commerce. Debra Damo, a considerable number of dinars (gold coins) and dirhams (silver coins) dating from A.H. 84 (703 A.D.) which belonged to the Umayyad Caliph, Abd al-Malik, have been discovered. They were in such excellent condition that this suggests they circulated very little.⁷⁹ Fragments of silk textiles which were used to wrap relics and other sacred objects were also found in this monastery. Experts have dated some of the

72. *Patr. Orientalis*, *op. cit.*, pp. 41–42.

73. Trimmingham claims that they were pirates but his argument is not convincing, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 46–47; Yusuf Fadl Hasan, *The Arab and the Sudan*, p. 30.

75. Trimmingham, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–47; Yusuf, *op. cit.*, p. 30. In this connection, Hurani in his *Arab Seafaring* adds "The expedition sacked Adulis, but met with a defeat on land", p. 54.

76. There was no official declaration from the central government about the occupation of Dahlak. It is assumed from the fact that Dahlak was used as a place of exile for some politically dangerous Muslims. R. Basset, "Les inscriptions de l'île de Dahlak": *JA*, (1893), p. 89; Yusuf, *op. cit.*, p. 30; Trimmingham, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

77. Yusuf, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

78. W. Muir, *The Caliphate; Its Rise, Decline and Fall*, p. 428; L. Caetani, *op. cit.*, fasc. 5, p. 1707.

79. D. Matthews and A. Mordini, "The Monastery of Debra Damo, Ethiopia": *Archaeologia*, 97 (1951), p. 50 ff; A. Mordini, "Un tissu musulman du Moyen Age provenant du couvent de Dabra Dar (Tigrai, Éthiopie)": *AE* 2 (1957), p. 76.

fragments as belonging to the period between the sixth and the eighth centuries.⁸⁰ The existence of these coins proves the close commercial ties between Ethiopia and the Muslim world, the main routes being through the Sudan and by the Red Sea.⁸¹

The Arabs who had settled in the Sudan in the previous century and who had founded the port of Badi, played an important role in conducting trade with Ethiopia. Through this channel, Ethiopian ivory tusks, ostrich eggs and agricultural products were exported to the Arab world in exchange for perfumes, textiles, coins and decorative objects.⁸² Many people from Ethiopia and the Sudan were also traded as slaves. Apart from trade, the Arab merchants had another serious task to accomplish. They, like the Christian merchants in the Mediterranean world of an earlier time, were now missionaries of their own religion in this region. Since their commercial activities extended to all the coastal areas of northwest and east Africa, Islam, at least in an unorganized form, must have touched all these regions.⁸³ Thus Islam succeeded in gaining followers whose numbers increased rapidly.

At first the expansion of Islam was peaceful but later it became bloody. The Khawariq, a fanatical and puritanical sect, created serious difficulties, first in the Barka Valley in 759 A.D. and continuously in northern Ethiopia from 765 A.D.⁸⁴ If we recall the fact that in 700 A.D. the Patriarch of Alexandria sent a bishop named Barnabas to the port of Aidhab to minister to the Christian merchants and to evangelize the Beja tribes,⁸⁵ one can say that Christianity was competing with Islam in the field of missionary activities in this region.

During this century relations between Aksum and Nubia were greatly improved. The war which had broken out in the previous century between Mekuriah and Aksum had ended in favour of the Jacobite faction. Now the King of Nubia, Cyriacus, as the chronicler of the Patriarch of Alexandria describes, "was the orthodox Ethiopian king of Al-Mukurrah; and he was entitled the Great King, upon whom the crown descended from Heaven; and he governed as far as the southern extremities of the earth, for he is the Greek (sic.) king, fourth of the kings of the earth; and none of the other kingdoms stands up against him, but their kings attend him when he passes through their territory. And he is under the jurisdiction of Mark of the Evangelist, for the patriarch of the Jacobites in Egypt exercises authority over him, and over all the kings of the Abyssinians and the Nubians; and he has in his country an orthodox bishop whom the patriarch ordains as metropolitan, and who ordains for the king, the bishops and the priests in that land. And when the metropolitan dies, the patriarch of Alexandria appoints another for him, whom he chooses, and ordains him for that people."⁸⁶

The chronicler has obviously confused the Nubian and Ethiopian monarchs, as at least part of this description must refer to the Aksumite Emperor. Nevertheless, the information clarifies the number of Metropolitans sent to Nubia and Ethiopia, and out-

lines their functions. As was mentioned in the pseudo-canon of Nicea, only Metropolitan was permitted to be sent to Aksum, and one to Nubia. His function, in case, was to ordain priests and deacons. (It is very doubtful that he ordained monks). Teaching and evangelization were not considered as part of his duties, hence he never involved in missionary work. Generally speaking, this lack of emphasis on missionary activities is a point of weakness of Oriental Churches. Although the Muslim rulers of Egypt were unhappy about the close relations of the Patriarch of Alexandria with Christian monarchs of Ethiopia and Nubia,⁸⁷ as the chronicler points out, it became routine duty of the Patriarch to appoint a new Metropolitan when the previous one died. The names of the Metropolitans, however, have not been given.

The monarchs of Ethiopia and Nubia demonstrated the strength of their loyalty to the Patriarch and to the oppressed Christians when they undertook a joint expedition against Egypt. The situation which had provoked this action is explained in the following extract:

"...Now letters had been sent to this king from Egypt, and had reached him from the father, Abba Michael [744-768], was in prison with us. And Abd al-Malik heard of these communications, and therefore he seized the patriarch and kept him in custody. Then king Cyriacus marched forth from the land of the Nubians toward Egypt with a great army, including a hundred thousand horsemen, with a hundred thousand horses and a hundred thousand camels. And we were informed by those who had witnessed it with his own eyes that the horses which the Nubians used to fight with their forefeet and hindfeet in battle as their riders fought upon backs, and that they were small horses, no higher than asses. And when they approached Misr that they might capture the city, and had encamped at the Pool known this day as the Pool of the Ethiopians, they plundered and slew and made prisoners the Muslims."⁸⁸

In connection with this, the Ethiopian version is in some respects different: When the King of Ethiopia heard the history of this father, and how the Muslim governors had punished him, and how they had shut him up in prison, he was filled with holy indignation, and he went down into Egypt, and he came to Upper Egypt and laid waste many cities and spoiled them. When he went down to the lower Egypt there were with him ten thousand horses, and one hundred thousand men and one hundred thousand camels. When the King of Egypt knew that all this (invasion) had taken place for the sake of the (arch) bishop, he released him from prison, and heaped great honours upon him; and in like manner he heaped exceedingly great honours upon the Christian people. Then the King of Egypt entrusted this father to write a letter to the King of Ethiopia, and order him to return to his own country. And this father sent a letter to the King of Ethiopia wherein he received blessings upon him, and upon his governors and generals, and all his army he said unto him, 'Behold God hath delivered us from the bonds of captivity through thee. And now return to thy country in safety and peace, and God will reward thee in the kingdom of heaven for the toil which thou hast undertaken for me.' When the King of Ethiopia had read the letter sent to him by this father

80. A. Mordini, "I tessili medioevali del convento di Dabra Dammo": *ACISE* (Roma, 1960), p. 240; D. Matthews and A. Mordini, "The Monastery of Debra Damo, Ethiopia", p. 53.

81. A. Mordini, "Un tessuto musulmano del Moyen Age provenant du couvent de Dabra Dammo", p. 76.

82. Yusuf, *op. cit.*, p. 65; cf. U. Monneret de Villard, "Note sulle influenze asiatiche nell'Africa Orientale": *RSO* 17 (1938), p. 324.

83. U. Monneret de Villard, "Note," p. 317 ff.

84. H.A. MacMichael, *A History of the Arabs in the Sudan*, 2 Vols., (Cambridge, 1922), Vol. I, p. 162.

85. J.S. Trimmingham, *Islam in the Sudan*, (London, 1949), p. 58, n. 5.

86. *Patrologia Orientalis*, Vol. V, pp. 145-146.

87. H.G. Wiet, *L'Égypte Byzantine et Musulmane*, (Cairo, 1932), Vol. II, p. 131.

88. *Patrologia Orientalis*, Vol. V, p. 144; H.A. MacMichael, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 160-161; E. Zyhlarz, "I della Nubia prima dell'Islam: uno sguardo storico sul Sudan antico e medioevale": *RSE* 3 (1932), p. 259-260.

Archbishop Abbâ MICHAEL, he rose up quickly and returned to his country in peace".⁸⁹

After this military intervention, the Patriarch was released and conditions improved for the Christians in Egypt. The Patriarch wrote a letter to the two monarchs explaining the situation and bidding them to return to their own countries. Since their mission had been accomplished, they left Egypt.

6. Internal Situation

Apart from the military pact, there were undoubtedly close cultural ties between Ethiopia and Nubia, but today we do not have sufficient sources to provide a detailed picture. Eventually archaeological findings in both countries will enable us to explore the topic more fully.⁹⁰ In the meantime perhaps the funeral inscription of Ham⁹¹ found in northern Ethiopia, makes an important contribution in this respect. It is a Ge'ez inscription but the stone on which it was engraved is identical to that of the altar of offerings at Meroe.⁹² The content recalls the Christian funeral epigrams of Nubia, while in Ethiopia it is the first example of its kind ever discovered. Even the name Giho must be of Meroitic origin.⁹³ Although the name Giho sounds strange, her father's name in Ethiopian is Mengesa. I think this is the first form of Mengesha, a name widely used in Ethiopia today. (Since it had not been developed at that time, there is no other alternative). The expression ወለተ መንግሥ (daughter of Mengesa) is common in Semitic languages to show patri-lineage. Who was this Mengesha? This question cannot be answered from the text. But the fact that he erected a monument for his daughter, who died early in life, indicates that he was at least a man who belonged to the upper classes.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1) ሞተት ፡ ጊሐ ፡ ወለተ ፡ መንግሥ ፡ በወር ፡ | 1. Giho the daughter of Mengesa died in the mon - |
| 2) ጎ ፡ ታሕሳስ ፡ አሜ ፡ ፳፭ ፡ 94 ለሠርቅ ፡ አ | 2. th of Tahsas (Dec.) on the 27th day, on |
| 3) ሜ ፡ መንተዊሁ ፡ ለጊና ፡ በዕለተ ፡ ረ | 3. The eve of Christmas on the day of We- |
| 4) በዕ ፡ ወጎሪቶ ፡ ዓመተ ፡ እኔን ፡ ጸረ | 4. dnesday. And died a year later after we had (conquered?) Our en- |
| 5) ነ ፡ አለ ፡ ሠህል ፡ ወባሕት ፡ በከ | 5. my Ella Sahl. However, it is |
| 6) መ ፡ ጽሑፍ ፡ ብፁዕ ፡ ዘይትወለ | 6. written "(blessed is) man that is born |
| 7) ድ ፡ እም አንስት ፡ ዘሕዳጠ ፡ | 7. of a woman is of few |
| 8) መዋዕሊሁ ፡ በከመ ፡ ጽሑፍ ፡ | 8. days" ⁹⁵ and as it is written |
| 9) ውስተ ፡ ወንጌል ፡ ዘበልዐ ፡ ሥጋ | 9. in the Gospel, "whoso eateth my flesh |
| 10) የ ፡ ወሰቲየ ፡ ደምየ ፡ ኢይጥዕማ ፡ | 10. and drinketh my blood hath eternal life |
| 11) ለሞት ፡ ወእነ ፡ አነሥእ ፡ አሜ ፡ | 11. and I will raise him up at |
| 12) ደጎሪ ፡ ዕለት ፡ በከመ ፡ ጽሑፍ ፡ | 12. the last day", ⁹⁶ and as written |

⁸⁹ W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints*, Vol. III, pp. 710-711.

⁹⁰ H. de Contenson, "Relations entre la Nubie chrétienne et l'Éthiopie axoumite": *PICES*, Vol. I (1966), pp. 17-18.

⁹¹ Conti Rossini, "L'iscrizione etiopica di Ham": *Atti della R. Acc. d'Italia*, serie 7, Vol. I, (1939), pp. 1-4.

⁹² U. Monneret de Villard, "L'iscrizione etiopica di Ham e l'epigrafia meroitica": *Aegyptus* 20 (1940), pp. 61-68.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁹⁴ From the picture of the inscription it is not clear whether it is ፯ or ፰. Historically both are possible. The former indicates that it was a leap year and the latter that it was a normal year. Conti Rossini took it as ፯, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁹⁵ Job, 14 : 1.

⁹⁶ John, 6 : 54.

13) ውስተ ፡ ነብይ ፡ ምዕታን ፡ ይትነ

13. in (the book of) the Prophet, "The dead men shall

14) ሥኡ ፡ ወየሐይው ፡ እለ ፡ ውስ

14. live, and rise out of

15) ተ ፡ መቃብር ፡

15. the tomb".⁹⁷

The text is very clear and still maintains the old vertical line to separate one word from another. (This does not appear in the Ge'ez inscriptions from Mareb). The only obscure word which presents difficulty is on line 4: እኔን ፡.⁹⁸ If we analyze the complete phrase in this passage, it makes sense if we consider this word as 'predicat', however the meaning of it does remain obscure. The vocalization of some words is quite different from present usage: for example, instead of አመ ፡ አሜ ፡ ነብይ ፡ ነብይ ፡ አንእስት ፡ አንስት ፡ ሃህል ፡ ሠህል ፡ ሰትየ ፡ ሰትየ ፡. In orthography, on the other hand, except for two cases: ታሕሳስ and ጸረነ ፡, we do not see any change. The inscriptions, according to internal and external evidence, can be dated from the second half of the eighth century.⁹⁹

This particular inscription is important both from a chronological and a religious viewpoint. It is, so far, the first inscription in which the chronology used in Ethiopia is indicated. The era is not given. However, the basis of calculation is the solar system. It is, in fact, the old Egyptian calendar which was adopted by the Alexandrian Church during the Christian era.¹⁰⁰ The beginning of a new year¹⁰¹ was determined by the first annual appearance of the star Sothis which coincided with the rising of the Nile at the end of August. The Copts in Egypt made a slight change which partially incorporated the lunar system into the calendar in order to fix the day of such shifting holidays as Easter.¹⁰² Usually Easter, for example, should be celebrated on a day of the full moon, on Sunday at the time of the equinox. But if it coincides with the Jewish Passover, it should be moved to the next Sunday.

There is no doubt that the Ethiopians derived their calendar from Egypt. It has 365¼ days which are arranged in twelve months each consisting of thirty days. The remaining five days are known as *Pagumé*, from the Greek word *Hepagomena* which means 'intercalated' days. Every fourth year *Pagumé* is six days. The years are grouped into cycles of four years and each year bears the name of one Evangelist: *Zemmene Mattewo*, *Zemmene Margos*, *Zemmene Lukas* and *Zemmene Yohannes*. According to Ethiopian scholars, the calendar, which is still in use, is attributed to Demetrius (189-231), Patriarch of Alexandria. In the twenty-sixth year of his consecration as Patriarch, he systematized the calendar which was then fully adopted by the Ethiopians.¹⁰³ The Ethiopian calendar differs from the European by seven or eight years.

There were two attempts to fix a starting point for the Christian calendar. The first is attributed to Julian the African 221 A.D. who calculated 5,500 years from the creation of the world to the birth of Christ. Apparently his computation was based on the genealogical orders of the Bible. The other attempt, which occurred in the fourth century, was made by

⁹⁷ Isaiah, 26 : 19.

⁹⁸ Conti Rossini's explanations of this word are not entirely satisfactory. "L'iscrizione etiopica di Ham", p. 1.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Murad Kamil, "The Ethiopian Calendar": *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts*, (Fouad University), 12, I, II, (1950), p. 91; M. Chaîne, *La chronologie des temps chrétiens de l'Égypte et de l'Éthiopie*, (Paris, 1924), p. 3 ff.; P. Mauro da Leonessa, *Cronologia e calendario etiopico*, (Tivoli, 1934), p. 22.

¹⁰¹ M. Chaîne, *op. cit.*, p. 3; P. Mauro da Leonessa, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁰² M. Chaîne, *op. cit.*, p. 8 ff.; P. Mauro da Leonessa, *op. cit.*, p. 90 ff.

¹⁰³ M. Chaîne, *op. cit.*, p. 26 ff.

Pandor and Anianos and it calculates 5,492-3 years from the creation of the world to the birth of Christ. This accounts for the seven or eight years' difference between the two calendars.¹⁰⁴ To illustrate the discrepancy the dates 7 B.C. or 8 B.C. in the former calendar would correspond to 1 A.D. in the latter. These differences have remained unchanged up to the present day.

As for the difference in the number of days, it is a matter of astronomical accuracy. The length of the year is precisely 365.2422 days: that is, a little more than eleven minutes and fifteen seconds too long each year. Every 130 years this adds up to a little over one day or three days in every 400 years. This fact was known to European scholars of the sixteenth century. In 1582, Pope Gregory, after consultation with astronomers, reformed the Julian calendar which had been in effect since 46 B.C. The fourth of October became the fifteenth of October in the Gregorian calendar, so named after the Pope.¹⁰⁵ The reformed calendar was not introduced into the church of Alexandria, consequently Ethiopia retained the old calendar.

With regard to the new year, both the Copts and the Ethiopians use the old Egyptian calendar which calculates the new year from the period of the inundation of the Nile at the end of August whereas the Europeans followed the Roman calendar which begins the year in January. Since 153 B.C. the Romans had regarded January the first as the commencement of the year because the feast of Janus, the god of the Gate, was celebrated on this day.

There is also a difference in calculating the starting point of the day. The Oriental churches generally reckon time from early daylight-7 A.M. For them, day and night consists of a cycle of twelve hours.

The names of the days in Ge'ez are based on the Bible, particularly the first chapter of Genesis, which refers to the first day, the second day ...when it speaks of the creation of the world. Most of the Ge'ez terms are adaptations of Biblical expressions: አሁኑ : Sunday; ሰኞ : Monday; ማክሰኞ : Tuesday; ረቡዕ : Wednesday; ጥብሐ : Thursday; ፃርብ : Friday from the verb ፀረብ : which means "to set in" indicating the end of the week; and ቅዳሜ : Saturday, the first Sabbath to distinguish it from Sunday which is also called Sabbath.

The names of the months of the year are more complicated. We do not know their exact origin.¹⁰⁶ Possibly they are based on agricultural life. Certainly they do not seem to be of foreign origin:

Ethiopian Name	Coptic Name and Possible Significance of the Ethiopian Months
1) Meskerem መስከረም :	Tut (Sept.) passed from one season to another: i.e. transit period
2) Tiqimt ጥቅምት :	Babah (Oct.) decisive month for economic life
3) Hidar ኅዳር :	Hatur (Nov.) most probably of Coptic origin
4) Tahsas ታሕሳስ :	Kiyak (Dec.) to collect; period of harvest
5) Tir ጥር :	Tubah (Jan.) the month in which the days

104. M. Chaine, *op. cit.*, p. 9 ff.; Conti Rossini, *Tabelle comparative del calendario etiopico col calendario romano* (Roma, 1948), p. 3 ff.; P. Mauro da Leonessa, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

105. M. Chaine, *op. cit.*, p. 79; P. Mauro da Leonessa, *op. cit.*, p. 104 ff.

106. Murad Kamil, *op. cit.*, p. 92; Conti Rossini, states: "I nomi dei mesi in etiopico rimangono un curioso enigma", "Aethiopica": RSO 9 (1921-23), p. 375.

6) Yekatit ዩካቲት :	begin to lengthen
7) Megabit ሜጋቢት :	Amsir (Feb.) last days of harvest,
8) Miazia ሜያዝያ :	Baramhat (March) month of the equinox
9) Ginbot ግንቦት :	Boramudah (April) the month of wedding;
10) Sené ሰኔ :	Basans (May) the month of work,
	Ba'unah (June) the month when nat
	blossoms,
11) Hamlé ሐምሌ :	Abib (July) a month of green,
12) Nehasé ነሐሴ :	Misra (August) the end of the year. ¹⁰⁷
13) Pagumé ታምሤ :	al-Nasi or al-Sahr al Sagir.

The calendar used in Ethiopia is calculated from 7 A.D., the year of the Incarnation according to Julian the African. In addition to the Julian calendar, Ethiopia drew on many other calendars from the Mediterranean world. One was calculated from the era of Alexander or Seleucids (321 B.C.), another from the era of Martyrs (277 A.D. Julian or 285 A.D. Gregorian) while others included one calculated from the Conversion of Ethiopia (3 A.D.) and another from the era of Hagra or the conquest of Egypt by the Muslims (6 A.D.).¹⁰⁸

The significance of the funeral inscription from the religious point of view is extremely interesting. The usage of Old and New Testament passages indicates the existence of a complete version of the Bible in Ge'ez. The date of the composition also underlines its importance for the Biblical critic. In addition, the usage of Biblical epigrams suggests the widespread circulation of the Bible in Ethiopia. Christmas, in its Greek form *Gem*, appears for the first time in an Ethiopian source and the inscription itself provides insight into Christian life of the times.

Coins represent another reliable source of information about the seventh and eighth centuries.¹⁰⁹ Ethiopian Emperors continued to mint coins until the tenth century but among those found we can barely read the legends of the Emperors following Bete Israel.

Emperor	Content	Language	Metal
1) Nazena	Nazena + By Grace of God	Greek	gold and silver
2) Ousanas II	Ousanas King + By the Grace of God	Greek	gold
3) Ousas	Ousas King + By the Grace of God	Greek	gold
4) Anaeb or Abana	Anaeb or Abana + thanks to God	Greek	silver
5) Alalimyris	Alalimyris King + of the race of Loei?	Greek	silver
6) Ella Gebez	Ella Gebez + Negus, King	Greek and Ge'ez	gold
7) Iyoel	Iyoel + King of Aksumites	Greek and Ge'ez	gold, silver and bronze
8) Ithlia	_____	Greek	gold and silver
9) Wazena(II?)	Wazena Negus + May it please the people	Ge'ez	bronze

107. The main source of this information is Kidane Weld Kifle, መጽሐፈ : ሠዋስው : ወግሥ : ወመዝገብ ታላት : ሐጺስ : (Addis Ababa, 1956); C. Conti Rossini, "Aethiopica II": RSO 10 (1925), pp. 495-496.

108. *Chronique de Galawdewos (Claudius) roi d'Éthiopie*, ed. and trans. W.E. Conzelmann, (Paris, 1895), p. 186-187.

109. Because of lack of sufficient criteria to distinguish them, we are obliged to treat them together. The list is based on A. Anzani, "Numismatica axumita": *Rivista Italiana di numismatica*, serie 3, Vol. (1926), trans. Azmatch Kinfu (Asmara, 1968), p. 38; Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiofia*, (Bergamon, 19 Plate 60; A. Kammerer, *La mer rouge, l'Abyssinie et l'Arabie depuis l'antiquité*, (Cairo, 1930), Vol. pt. 3, pp. 222-223; *Idem, Essai sur l'histoire antique d'Abyssinie* (Paris, 1926), pp. 154-170.

10) Armah	Armah Negus + Happiness and greetings to the people	Ge'ez	gold and brass
11) Hataz I	Hataz Negus + Mercy to the people	Ge'ez	bronze
12) Gerssem	Gerssem Negus + You will conquer with Christ	Ge'ez	gold and bronze
13) Hataz II	Hataz Negus + May grace be with the people	Ge'ez	bronze

There is no certainty about the correctness of the above order. It is based simply on the deformation and deterioration of the design, size and shape of the coins. Nevertheless, the continuous minting of coins up to the tenth century is significant from a commercial and historical point of view. As we have already mentioned, from the time of the Islamic expansion relations between Ethiopia and the Mediterranean world were interrupted. But if the purpose of minting gold coins was for trade, why did the Aksumite Emperors continue to mint them? Although foreign trade declined after the Islamic expansion, it did not die out altogether. Rather it was concentrated on one market: the Mediterranean area of the Arab world. Thus the past commercial ties between Ethiopian and the Mediterranean world were maintained. Greek legends continued to be used on coins and some coins minted during this period have been found in Arabia.

Historically, changes on the coins are of significance. In most cases, on the reverse side the effigy of the Emperor was replaced by a cross. There were also innovations with regard to the legends. Whereas on previous coins generally there was a legend concerning the race of the king, now, on one side the coins bore mottos revealing the relationship of the emperor to his people. These changes derive from a Christian cultural background. One may conclude that the influence of Christianity had increased and that it had become the stimulus and regulator of life in general. Islamic expansion had not yet seriously affected the evolution of the Christian faith in Ethiopia.

It is very striking that written sources, whether Ethiopian or foreign, do not mention the names of the Ethiopian emperors. Arabic sources always use the title "King of Abyssinia" when referring to an emperor, without specifically stating his name. With the exception of the lists of Ethiopian emperors, the kings remained un-named up to the end of the thirteenth century.

The number of kings varies from one list to another. However, some ¹¹⁰ agree on twenty emperors from the time of Adiaz, a contemporary of Mohammad. While the surname and throne name are given in some cases, most emperors have only one name.

Surname	Throne name	Years	Date
1. Zera	Eklewudem	10	(623-633) ¹¹¹
2. Germay	Asfar	15	(633-648)
3. Zera (II)	Zirgaz, or Girma Sor	8	(648-656)
4. Zirgaz	Digna Michael	21 ¹¹²	(656-677)

¹¹⁰. These are mainly unpublished and are attached to *Gedle Abreha and Asbeha* found in Aksum and to a manuscript from Debre Marqos on *Bahre Hasab*. Both are dated. Cf. R. Basset, *Études sur l'histoire de l'Éthiopie*, (Paris, 1882), pp. 97-98; W. Budge, *The Life of Tukla Haymanot in the Version of Dabra Libanos*, (London, 1906), pp. 12-13; C. Conti Rossini, "Les listes des rois d'Aksum": *JA* (1909), pp. 299-301.

¹¹¹. There is a difference between the Aksumite and the Debre Marqos MSS. The dates of the latter are calculated from the creation of the world without interruption and it is therefore four years in advance (627-637). Cf. A. Anzani, "Le monete dei re di Axum": *Rivista italiana di num.*, ser. 4, Vol. I, (1941), pp. 62-68.

¹¹². In a marginal note marked in pencil in the Debre Marqos MS., it is indicated that he is a contemporary of Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium, which is correct.

5. Ekle	Bahre Ekil	19	(677-696)
6. Hizba Sion	Gum	24	(696-720)
7. —	Asgomgum	5	(720-725)
8. —	Latem	16	(725-741)
9. —	Telatem	21	(741-762)
10. Adegosh	Lul Seged	13	(762-775)
11. —	Ayzur ¹¹³	half a day	
12. Didim	Almaz Seged	5	(775-780)
13. —	Wudemdem	10	(780-790)
14. Dimawudem	Wudem Asferé	30 ¹¹⁴	(790-820)
15. Remha	Armah	5	(820-825)
16. —	Dagnajan ¹¹⁵	19 & 10 months	(825-845)
17. —	Dagajan or Gidajan ¹¹⁶	10 months	
18. —	Gudit	40	(845-885)
19. Dagnajan	Anbessa Wudem ¹¹⁷	20	(885-905)
20. —	Dil Ne'ad	10	(905-915)

¹¹³. He died of suffocation the same day because crowds gathered round him to admire his handsome appearance. As a result of his death it became strictly forbidden to approach an Emperor.

¹¹⁴. There are two other versions of his life. In some MSS. of Gojjam he is considered as having ruled for 150 years; in others, particularly of Tigré, it is indicated that he lived for 150 years but no mention is made of his having ruled.

¹¹⁵. The following note about this king appears in a MS. belonging to the private collection of *Qese Gebez Tekle Haimanot* of Aksum: "And this man recruited an army of 100,000 and marched against the land of the Arabs, west of Ethiopia, to subdue another country boasting (but) on the size of his army. However, because of lack of (geographical) knowledge he perished in the sand believing that it was a vast land. Even a single person did not survive to tell the news." There is also another note on the last parchments of MS. Arch. 15 in the National Library, Addis Ababa: "During his reign he took 150 priests from Aksum to Amhara and named them Deberas. After he left Tigré he made his capital city Weyna Dega. There were 60 Tabots (Tabernacles) who were accompanying him to the battle field. His soldiers drank the water of Fik from the Lake of Misrae Derginda, right of Tekezze (river) from Tahiya Girai, Rib. It was astonishing that none (of his men) knew the region. Then he returned from Rib and when he counted his army he found 180,500 who were equipped with battle helmets. He made them to follow him and went to his father. However the father left his son Dil Ne'ad here (in the same place). From him the kingdom was taken and given to others who were not Israelites i.e. Zagwé and ruled 137 years."

¹¹⁶. In the same collection of *Qese Gebez Tekle Haimanot* he is identified with *Anbessa Wudem*: "And he came to the throne the son of Dagnajan, *Anbessa Wudem*, and stayed wandering from one mountain to another so that he escaped from Gudit. His previous name was Gidajan and when he was crowned he received the name of *Anbessa Wudem*." p. (66).

¹¹⁷. In the inventory collected by the Board of Antiquities, Tigré File No. 71, there is the following note about *Anbessa Wudem*: "I Abba Michael, the sinner, son of Saint Antony of the monastery of El Arebeh (sic) on the Red Sea coast; I have been consecrated by Abba Macarius Archbishop of Alexandria, bishop of Ethiopia during the reign of *Anbessa Wudem*, the king. By the will of God I anointed seven kings and inaugurated 100 churches. Also I consecrated this monastery church in the name of the Archangel Michael. This happened in 866 Era of Martyrs. I ordained 20,700 priests, and monks 5,000 and baptized 50,000 people in the river." This note is recorded on the four Gospels of Michael Amba in the province of Hulet Awila'ilo in the region of Sira'e in Tigré. According to tradition, construction of this rock-hewn church is attributed to *Anbessa Wudem*. Whether this MS. belongs to the same period is difficult to assess. Possibly it has been copied from the original MS. at later date because of its historical importance for the church. The note about Bishop Michael from the monastery of *Abba Antony of El Arebeh* who was ordained by Patriarch Macarius II (1102-1129) is quite clear in detail. The recorded date, 866 Era of Martyrs, differs from the period of Macarius by only ten years. It is also very close to the accepted date of the change of the dynasty from Aksum to Zagwé. Cf. C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, p. 303; J. Doresse, *Ethiopia*, (London, 1956), p. 93; A. Jones and E. Monroe, *A History of Ethiopia*, (London, 1953), p. 48; E. Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*, (London, 1960), p. 64; J.S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 55.

CHAPTER IX

SYMPTOMS OF DECLINE

1. The Economic and Political Situation

Arab, Coptic, and Ethiopian sources provide adequate material for an examination of events in the ninth century. During the time of the Patriarch Mark II (799-819) we learn that the normal commercial relations between Ethiopia and Nubia on the one hand, and Egypt on the other, have been interrupted because of internal problems in Egypt.

"When the strife broke out between the two brothers, a certain rebel arose, and assembled an innumerable army, and kept the road between Egypt and the East. And he robbed those that were journeying to Misr or Upper Egypt or Abyssinia or Nubia of all their goods; so that travelling was interrupted on the roads and all the tracks through fear of him."¹

By the time of the Patriarch's successor, Jacob (819-830) however, commercial activities had been renewed² and trade flourished between Ethiopia and the Arab world. The land route which began from Upper Egypt and reached Ethiopia via Nubia was crowded with caravans. Through the ports of Dahlak (Massawa) and Badi passed goods bound for the Ethiopian interior and for Hijaz and Yemen.³

Despite their expansion to the south, the Bejans do not seem to have been able to capture Dahlak. The summary of the agreement between Caliph Al-Mu'tasim and the leader of the Bejans, Kannun b. Abd al-Aziz dated 212/827, reads in the first clause: "The Beja land from Aswan to the land between Badi and Dahlak together with its inhabitants was to be the property of the caliph; Kannun b. Abd al-Aziz to remain its king."⁴ The southern border is defined in vague terms which suggest that Dahlak (Massawa) was not part of Beja land. Furthermore archaeological sources support the belief that it was within Ethiopian territory. In the village of Cim'hille northwest of Dahlak Kebir, are ruins similar to those of Cohaito and Toconda.⁵ Al-Yak'ubi, the Arab historian and geographer, states that Dahlak was an Ethiopian port. He also mentions Zeila at that

1. "History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria", ed. and trans. B. Evetts, *Patr. Orientalis* Vol. X, pp. 427-428; See also Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, (Bergamo, 1928), p. 284; Yusuf Fadl Hasan, *The Arabs and the Sudan*, (Edinburgh, 1967), p. 35.

2. Conti Rossini, *op. cit.*, p. 284; *Patr. Orientalis*, Vol. X, p. 503.

3. S. Labib, *Handelsgeschichte Aegyptens im Spätmittelalter* (1171-1517), (Wiesbaden, 1965), p. 14. Details of the land route are given by Monneret de Villard, "Note sulle influenze asiatiche nell' Africa Orientale": *RSO* 17 (1938), pp. 322-323.

4. Yusuf Fadl Hasan, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

5. G. Puglisi, "Alcuni vestigi dell'isola di Dahlac Chebir e la leggenda dei Furs": *PICES*, I (1966), pp. 35 ff.; G. S. Tedeschi, "Note storiche sulle isole Dahlak": *PICES*, I (1966), p. 54.

time⁶ but does not identify it categorically as Ethiopian.⁷ Badi certainly was within Beja territory. It was under Arab control but apparently there was a permanent trade mission from Aksum located there. An Arab funeral inscription in a Muslim graveyard reveals that an Ethiopian Muslim named Aksum b. Ya'lum who died around 200–210 A.H./815–825 A.D. was buried in a village called Kohr Nubt in the Sudan west of the port of Badi.⁸ The discovery of this inscription has both commercial and geographical importance, as it testifies to the role of Aksum in the economic life of the country.

The Ethiopians were active in other areas too. A Persian writer Aazami states that "the inroads of the Abyssinians"⁹ destroyed the very important port of Obulla at the mouth of the Tigris on the Persian Gulf in A. H. 256/870 A. D. This port is the old Apologus of *The Periplus* which was characterized as a port "designated by law".¹⁰ One may conclude from this information that Ethiopia was still a maritime power of some strength. The intention in attacking Obulla is not made clear from this source but one can only assume, in comparison with events in Jeddah¹¹, that the motive was commercial rivalry. However, such an attack must have involved the cooperation of the indigenous people. Another Persian writer mentions that the Governor of the province of Kurasan experienced difficulties in administering his province as a man called "The Veiled Sayyid" had rallied the Ethiopians behind him. Subsequently he led them in a rebellion so he was also known as "the leader of the Ethiopians".¹²

The extent of commercial exchange between Ethiopia and Egypt during the ninth century is evidenced by the Muslim coins and pieces of textile found in Ethiopia. The coins, discovered in the monastery of Debre Damo, belonged to the Abbasid Caliphs; the most recent date being that of Caliph al-Musta'in billah A. H. 251/865 A. D.¹³ Such an abundance of Muslim coins in a rigidly Christian monastery is puzzling. Perhaps the likely explanation is that they were "ex-voto offerings to the deceased, as a result of war expeditions against Moslem peoples".¹⁴ A considerable number of Egyptian textiles, undoubtedly used to wrap relics and to cover sacred objects, are also preserved in the same monastery. Egypt at that time was pre-eminent in the production of textiles.¹⁵ Some from Debre Damo bear embroidered Arabic inscriptions and dates. A. Mordini classified them in two groups: the first belonging to the period of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil (A.H. 232–247/847–861 A.D.) and the second to the Tulunids Caliphate (868–905 A.D.).¹⁶ One piece is embroidered in red silk with an Arabic phrase which states that the material was made in Egypt in A.H. 278/891 A.D.¹⁷ A quantity of other pieces has also been found in the monastery of Abba Pentelêwon near Aksum. The existence of such Egyptian textiles in Ethiopia

6. Al-Yak'ubi, states: "Dahlak, dans les parages de Ghalafika: c'est l'île du Négus", *Les Pays*, trans. G. Wiet, (Cairo, 1937), p. 159.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Yusuf Fadl Hasan, *op. cit.*, pp. 61–62; Monneret de Villard, *op. cit.*, pp. 323–324.

9. As quoted in Sulaiman Nadavi, "Arab Navigation": *Islamic Culture* 15 (1941), p. 447.

10. *Periplus*, 35; Cf. W.H. Schoff, *The Periplus*, (London, 1912), p. 149.

11. Sulaiman Nadavi, "Arab Navigation", p. 447.

12. E.G. Browne, *An Abridged Translation of the History of Tabaristan compiled about A.H. 613 (A.D. 1216) by Muhammad b. al-Hasan b. Isfandiyyar*, (London, 1905), p. 180.

13. A. Mordini, "Un tissu musulman du Moyen Age provenant de couvent de Dabra Dammo": *AE* 2 (1957), p. 76; *Idem*, "I tessili medioevali del convento di Dabra Dammo": *ACISE* (Roma, 1960), p. 236; D. Matthews and A. Mordini, "The Monastery of Debra Damo, Ethiopia": *Archaeologia*, 97(1959), p. 50.

14. D. Matthews and A. Mordini, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

15. S. Labib, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

16. A. Mordini, "Un tissu", p. 76.

17. *Ibidem*, "I tessili medioevali", p. 236.

towards the end of the ninth century indicates that commercial activities continued at least until the end of this century. There is evidence that Ethiopian goods were transported from Yemen to Baghdad, the second most important trade centre in the Arab world. Here they were displayed with goods from India, China, Tibet, Dailam and other places. Ethiopian trade with Egypt included such items as ostrich eggs, peacocks, feathers and plants of various sizes and quality.¹⁹

The close commercial contact had certain political and cultural ramifications. Ahmed ibn Touloun, Governor of Egypt at the time of the Abbasid dynasty, had a good number of mercenaries from Ethiopia and Greece. Through the vigorous efforts of these soldiers he succeeded in overthrowing the ruling dynasty and establishing his own. For Ethiopia, the impact of trade was largely cultural. Using Dahlak as a gateway, it became possible for Islam to penetrate first the coastal regions then gradually to move inland. According to tradition, which is now supported by documentary evidence, in A.H. 283/896 A.D. a Muslim Sultanate ruled by the Makhazumi dynasty existed in eastern Shewa in the region of Ifat.²³

The pressure on the Christian Empire of Ethiopia was not only from the East but also from the Beja tribes in the north. As we have seen previously, the Bejans were bound by a peace treaty not to attack Egypt. So they turned their attention to Ethiopia and Nubia. However, a few years later in 831 A.D. an agreement was reached between the Bejans and the people of Alodia²⁴ which lasted for some time. Thus the Bejans concentrated their interest on Ethiopia. Since they were nomads, Ethiopia best served their purpose by providing grazing areas, so they began infiltrating Aksumite territory.

Al-Yak'ubi indicates in his history composed about 872 A.D. that there were five small kingdoms of Bejans established within Ethiopia: 1) the Naqis who occupied the area between Assouan and the Barka Valley. Their capital city, Hajar, was an important centre of commerce and they were active in the exploitation of gold and precious stones; 2) the Baqlin who occupied the region of Rora, part of the Barka Valley; 3) the Bazin who occupied the area between the Christian kingdom of Alowa (Alodia) and the region of the Baqlin with whom they were at war. These people are probably the Kunama and Baria; 4) the Jarin who inhabited the western coast of the Red Sea as far as the north of Massawa; 5) the Qata, another branch of the Jarin, who lived on the coast of the Red Sea.²⁵ From a military point of view, the Bejans were well organized and their children were trained in the use of arms. Except for the first group who were gradually converted to Islam by Muslim merchants, the rest were pagans. Some were ruled by councils of nobles and others by a single tyrant.

As infiltration gave way to aggression on the part of the Bejans they met with some resistance from Ethiopia which was not yet in such a state of decay as to hand over part of its territory without a struggle. A vocalized Ge'ez inscription of Hasani Daniel, most

18. S. Labib, *op. cit.*, p. 11; Al-Yak'ubi, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

19. Zaky Mohamed Hassan, *Les Tulunides, étude de l'Égypte musulmane à la fin du IX^e siècle 868–905*, (Paris, 1933), p. 127.

20. Ch. Papadopoulos, *A History of the Alexandrian Church*, (Alexandria, 1935), (in Greek), p. 534.

21. S. Tedeschi, *op. cit.*, p. 54; E. Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*, (London, 1960), p. 62 ff.

22. E. Cerulli, "Il sultanato dello Scioa nel secolo XIII secondo un nuovo documento storico": *RSE* 1 (1941), p. 15. ff.

23. J. S. Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, (London, 1954), p. 58.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

25. R. Cornevin, *Histoire de l'Afrique*, 2 Vols., (Paris, 1962), Vol. I, p. 285; Trimmingham, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

probably a powerful Aksumite general, has been found which tells of this expedition against the Baria. He states that he marched as far as Kassala²⁶, conquered the Baria, took booty of cattle and then led the inhabitants back to Aksum as slaves. We do not actually find the word *Beja* used to describe the people but the date of the inscription coincides with the Bejan invasion or their later occupation. He had the intention of marching against other tribes as well but when he heard that his country had been invaded, he returned immediately to Aksum.

Hasani Daniel is the general who deposed the emperor and made himself *de facto* the supreme authority. As he emphasises in another inscription²⁷, this change took place without bloodshed. The title he used after he seized power was not *Negus* but *Hasani*. The word is derived from *ሐዘን*, meaning "bring up".²⁸ Perhaps he preferred this title because he was ruling the country in the name of a deposed emperor. The title was later adopted by Emperor Lalibela and other emperors of the restored Solomonic dynasty.²⁹

Al-Yak'ubi, on the other hand, maintains that the Empire was vast and ruled by a Christian Jacobite emperor. It would seem that he was aware of the doctrinal differences between the two Christian factions: the Jacobites and the Melkites. He also mentions that the emperor commanded a number of vassals and administered from his capital city Ka'abar, apparently Aksum.³⁰

The military and economic co-operation between Ethiopia and Nubia continued throughout this period. It seems that there was a strong alliance between them since whenever war broke out in one area they carried out joint expeditions, as the following passage from the history of the Patriarchs of Alexandria illustrates:

"When the patriarch [Joseph 830-849] had recovered his strength a little, he took thought for the affairs of Abyssinia and Nubia, and sent a letter to the people of those countries, and enquired after them and their churches. But he did not succeed in communicating with them on account of hostility between their kings and the Muslim governors of Egypt. And he prayed to God that there might be peace between them, so that he might attain his object, which was to restore the buildings under the jurisdiction of the Father, Saint Mark, the Evangelist. And God heard his prayer, and answered his petition. Now this war had lasted fourteen years between them, until Ibrāhīm, brother of Al-Ma'mūn, began to reign. He set guards on the road to Abyssinia and Nubia."³¹

As in the previous century, Ethiopia stood by Nubia when the latter was threatened by the enemy. The cause of the war is not mentioned but there is reason to suppose that it was either religious or economic. The text implies that the two countries successfully countered the Egyptian threat but the Ethiopians were no longer in a position to be on the offensive side. The times had changed: the struggle for survival had begun.

26. *DAE*, IV, p. 43.

27. *DAE*, IV, p. 46.

28. According to some authorities the word *Hasani* can be derived from the Agaw word *asena* which means King. (C. Conti Rossini, *La langue des Kemant en Abyssinie*, (Vienna, 1912), p. 171. Von Varenbergh, "Studien zur äthiopischen Reichsordnung": *Zeitschrift fuer Assyriologie*, 30 (1915), p. 3.). If this hypothesis proves correct it will shed new light on the later history of Aksum particularly the struggle for power by the Agaw people and their preoccupation with this matter.

29. E. Cerulli, "L'Etiopia medioevale in alcuni brani di scrittori arabi": *RSE* 3 (1943), pp. 274-276; *Idem*, "Punti di vista sulla storia dell'Etiopia": *ACISE* (1960), p. 8.

30. J. S. Trimmingham, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

31. *Patr. Or.*, Vol. X, p. 503.

The decline of Ethiopia began in the ninth century. This period is generally known as "the dark ages" in the sense that there is a complete lack of internal source material about events in Ethiopia between the end of the ninth and the twelfth centuries. The decline of culture is best illustrated in a comparison of the inscriptions of Hasani Daniel with the previous funeral epigram of Giho. The former is an unvocalized, or rather little vocalized, inscription revealing elementary orthographical errors. The only progress one can observe is in the punctuation: two vertical lines which used to separate one word from another have now been replaced by two dots. The handwriting is not symmetrical and the style has deteriorated which explains why the inscription is very difficult to read. The condition of the coins reveals a similar decline. There are deformities in the design and the mottos are barely legible.

Edward Gibbon, commenting on the advent of "the dark ages", stated:

"Encompassed on all sides by the enemies of their religion, the Aethiopians slept near a thousand years, forgetful of the world, by whom they were forgotten."³²

While this is a somewhat exaggerated assessment it does reflect the truth. It is a fact that Ethiopia was surrounded by unfriendly neighbours, but when a man finds himself in such circumstances, he rarely falls asleep! A more telling comment must say something about the vigilance of the Ethiopians. This comes from C. Harris, British envoy to the court of King Sahle Selassie, King of Shewa (1813-47) who observed:

"Aethiopia . . . now nearly isolated from the remainder of the world, rested for the next ten centuries a sealed book to European history, preserving her independence from all foreign yoke, and guarding in safety the flame of that faith, which she had inherited from her fathers."³³

2. The Doctrinal and Moral Situation

There was no break in the spiritual link between Ethiopia and the Church of Alexandria. A request for a new Metropolitan was always met as the Caliphs of Egypt offered no objections. One of the three principal functions of the Patriarchs of Alexandria was to be concerned with the affairs of Ethiopia and Nubia. On one occasion, Patriarch Jacob (James) consecrated a new Metropolitan named John and sent him through Nubia to Aksum.

It was a standing custom whenever the Ethiopian Emperor asked for a new Metropolitan that he sent gifts to the Patriarch. Among these gifts were young Christian children who were to be educated under the Patriarch's supervision. They were placed in a school in Alexandria but this aroused the anger of the Caliph. "Then he (the Caliph) made curious inquiries concerning the Roman and Abyssinian pages of the patriarch, who had been sent as presents to him from Africa and the Five Cities and Abyssinia and Nubia. For he was told that the patriarch had pages at Alexandria, who were being taught in the school."³⁴ The children were brought to the court of the Caliph and condemned to embrace Islam. The Patriarch defended their case forcefully: "Thou knowest that none of thy predecessors forced any one like these, who are Christians and the sons of Christians, to become Muslims. For they were presented to the churches as gifts, and came from the king of the Abyssinians, or from the Nubians or Romans; and they were sen-

32. E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (London, 1862), Vol. VI, p. 64.

33. C. Harris, *The Highlands of Ethiopia*, (London, 1844), Vol. III, p. 87.

34. *Patr. Or.*, Vol. X, p. 528.

to me as a present, and given to me."³⁵ The appeal of the Patriarch fell on deaf ears: "Therefore" concludes the chronicler, "he (the judge) gave orders that the youths should be brought in, while the patriarch was there, and intimidated them so that they acknowledged themselves Muslims before him in the patriarch's presence, although he tried to hold them to the Christian faith."³⁶ Further the judge gave orders that "the pages should be separated, and accordingly the Muslims shared them among themselves."³⁷

The following episode relating to this particular Metropolitan is recounted in "The History of the Patriarchs...":³⁸

"There was at that time a bishop named John, whom the father, Abba James, had ordained for the land of the Abyssinians. Now the King of the Abyssinians had gone forth to war. Then the people became disaffected, and drove away that bishop, and appointed another of their own free choice, thus breaking the canon. And the aforesaid bishop returned to Egypt and took up his abode at the Monastery of Baramus in Wadi Habib, because he had first become a monk there. But the Lord, who loves mankind, and desires to save them and restore them to the knowledge of the truth, did not allow that country and its inhabitants to remain in their disobedience, but he raised up against them the evangelical throne once more, that the Lord might show forth wonders in the following manner. For he sent down upon them and upon their cattle, a plague with great mortality, and caused the king to be defeated by all who fought against him; and his followers were slain. So, when he came back from the war, great sadness fell upon him. And he did not know what had been done to the bishop, nor how he had been banished from their city. For it was the queen who had caused this mischief, acting as Eudoxia did in her time against John the Golden Mouth. As soon therefore as the king learnt this, he hastened and wrote a letter to the good shepherd, Abba Joseph, saying to him: 'I prostrate myself before the evangelical throne, upon which thy Paternity has been counted worthy to sit, and by the grace of which my royal authority is confirmed. Now the people of my country have strayed away from the light of the holy see, and have set their feet in a path full of thorns by driving away thy vicar. Therefore, the Lord has sent down the punishment of that deed upon our heads, and has given us a taste of his vengeance through the death of men and cattle by the plague. Moreover he has forbidden heaven to rain upon us. But now, our holy father, overlook our folly, and send us someone who will pray to God for us, and intercede for us, that we may be saved by thy acceptable prayers'.

"When the father had read this letter, he rejoiced over the king's faith and quickly sent and summoned that bishop from the monastery of Baramus, and having encouraged and consoled him, sent him back to the Abyssinians. And he despatched an escort of trustworthy men with him on account of the dangers of the road, and gave him sufficient provision for the journey. And he dismissed the party, giving them his blessing that God might make their path easy. And God heard him; for they safely reached the friendly king, who rejoiced over them with all the natives of the land.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*, p. 530.

38. For the Latin text see E. Renaudot, *Historia Patriarcharum Alexandrinorum Jacobitarum*, (Paris, 1713), pp. 283-284.

"After this, Satan, the enemy of peace, suggested an idea to some of the people of that country. Accordingly, they waited upon the king, and said to him: 'We request thy majesty to command this bishop to be circumcised. For all the inhabitants of our country are circumcised except him'. And the working of Satan was so powerful that the king approved this proposal, namely that the aged bishop should be taken and circumcised, or else that he should return to the place whence he had come. And when the bishop recollected the hardships of his journeys, both when he departed and when he returned, and then of what he would experience again he dreaded the difficulties of the road both by land and water. So he said, 'I will submit to this, for the salvation of these souls, of which the Lord has appointed me shepherd without any merit of mine. Yet now Paul the apostle enjoins us saying: 'If any man is called without circumcision, let him not be circumcised'³⁹ So when he made this concession to them, God manifested a miracle in him, as he wrote to our father the patriarch, Abba Joseph; namely, that when they took him to circumcise him, and stripped him, they found the mark of circumcision in him, as if he had been circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. And he swore in his letter that he knew nothing of this before that day. Thus the king and the people of the country were satisfied and rejoiced greatly over this wonder, and accepted the bishop with joy."⁴⁰

The English translation of the Ethiopic version of the narrative is as follows:

"And in the days of this father the King of Ethiopia sent him a letter, saying, 'I do homage to the throng of MARK the evangelist, whereon to sit thou art worthy, and by his grace my kingdom hath waxed strong. I beseech thee to have compassion upon me and to send unto us as bishop Abbâ JOHN. There are certain men of our city who have gone astray from the light of the throne of Saint MARK the evangelist, and who have set their feet on the road which is full of thorns, and they have driven out Abbâ JOHN our bishop. Because of this great tribulation hath come upon our land and all our men are dying of the plague, and our beasts and cattle have perished, and God hath restrained the heavens so that they cannot rain upon our land, and our enemies have risen up against us and have conquered us, because we have not obeyed the commandments of God. And now, O holy ABUNA, have mercy upon us and upon our folly. Send us our Bishop JOHN so that he may entreat God, and pray for us, and deliver us from this tribulation through thy prayer and his own. And I will inform thee, O my father, what hath been the cause of this. I thy son was blessed by my father Abbâ JOHN the bishop, and he bade me farewell as he set me on my way with my soldiers, and he blessed me and then returned and dwelt in his diocese. And we departed to the war, and we continued to fight for very many days, and our enemies conquered us, and they destroyed our soldiers, and we took to flight and returned to our own country, and we missed Abbâ JOHN our bishop. And I enquired for him, and they told me that my wife, the queen, had driven him into exile because certain evil men had counselled her to do so, even as Queen EUDOXIA had in days of old driven JOHN of the Golden Mouth (CHRYSTOSTOM) into exile, and that they had appointed another bishop who was their choice; they have transgressed the command of the holy Canon, and therefore our country is destroyed. And now have pity upon us and send Abbâ JOHN to pray for us.' Now when they

39. I Corinthians, 7 : 18.

40. *Patr. Or.*, Vol. X, pp. 508-511; cf. Petrus ibn Rahib, *Chronicon Orientale: CSCO, Scriptores Arabici*, ser. 3, Vol. I, (Paris, 1903), p. 139 ff. (version).

drove that bishop out of Ethiopia he went and dwelt in the monastery wherein he had become a monk, and that was the monastery of Saint Abbâ MOSES of the desert of SCETE. When Abbâ JOSEPH the archbishop had read the letter of the King of Ethiopia, he rejoiced exceedingly because of his confidence, and he sent quickly to the desert of SCETE and brought back Abbâ JOHN, and he comforted him, and encouraged him, and sent brave men with him to the country of Ethiopia. As soon as he arrived, the plague ceased, and rain fell from heaven, and the king rejoiced with very great joy at his arrival; and this father rebuked the wicked sinners and converted them to the Orthodox Faith. And he likewise encouraged all Christian people in the right and good Faith which they had received from their fathers. And he used to interpret for them obscure passages in the Holy Scriptures, and declare their meaning unto them, and he preserved them by his teachings and prayers."⁴¹

The Ethiopian Synaxar and the history of the Patriarchs of Alexandria were written independently of one another but both refer to the transgression of canon law. It would appear that there was a movement by a certain group who advocated the independence of the Ethiopian Church from the Coptic Church of Alexandria. Such action was viewed as anticanon.⁴² In fact this seems to be the first recorded attempt by the Ethiopians to create an independent church since the introduction of Christianity. The passage from the Synaxar underlines the fact that the movement had diverged from the Alexandrian Faith in its doctrinal stand: "... and this father rebuked the wicked sinners and converted them to the Orthodox Faith". There is, however, no clear explanation of their doctrinal differences. The passage from the history of the Patriarchs, "Now the people of my country have strayed away from the light of the Holy See, and have set their feet in a path full of thorns by driving away thy vicar", implies that the disagreement was not doctrinal but disciplinary. Some of the movement's ideas may have come from another source. The stress on circumcision leads one to think that apparently the group had at least some inclination towards Judaism. Perhaps, as we shall see later, this was due to the existence of a Jewish community in East Africa if not in Ethiopia itself.

The writer Eldad claimed to belong to an independent Jewish kingdom of East Africa known as The Dan; hence his name, Danite. As summarized in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*:⁴³

"The tribe of Dan emigrated to the land of gold, Havilah (Kush), shortly after the separation of Judah and Israel. The tribes of Naphtali, Gad, and Asher joined the Danites later. They have a king called Adiel ben Malkiel, a prince by the name of Elizaphan, of the house of Elihab, and a judge named Abdan ben Mishael, who has the power to inflict the four capital punishments prescribed in the Law. The four tribes lead a nomadic life, and are continually at war with the five neighboring Ethiopian kings. Each tribe is in the field three months, and every warrior remains in the saddle without dismounting from one Sabbath to the next. They possess the entire Scriptures, but they do not read the Roll of Esther (not having been included in the miraculous salvation mentioned in it) nor Lamentations (to avoid its disheartening influence). They have a Talmud in pure Hebrew, but none of the Talmudic teachers is mentioned. Their ritual is introduced in the name of Joshua, who had received it from Moses, who in his turn had heard

its contents from the Almighty. They speak only Hebrew (Eldad himself professed not to understand a word of Ethiopic or Arabic)."⁴⁴

Commenting on the origin of Eldad, E.D. Goitein suggests that "he was neither merely a literary romancer nor a disguised Karaite, but simply a Falasha of Abyssinia".⁴⁵ The picture drawn by Eldad of the Falasha certainly differs from that of contemporary Falasha communities in Ethiopia. Perhaps the constant war waged against them has brought a radical change in their culture. The information, however, is the first of its kind which speaks of an organized Jewish community in Ethiopia and it could provide an important background for events later in this century.

41. W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, (London, 1928), Vol. I, pp. 185-186.

42. See below, p. 252.

43. *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, Vol. V, pp. 90-91.

44. Cf. G. Genebrando, *Eldad Danius Hebraeus Historicus de Judaeis Clausis eorumque in Aethiopia beatissimo imperio*, (Paris, 1563).

45. E.D. Goitein, "Note on Eldad the Danite", *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, N.S. Vol. XVII, (1926-27) p. 483.

CHAPTER X

THE FALL OF AKSUM

1. Lack of Spiritual Guidance

At the beginning of the tenth century there occurred an event which had most destructive consequences for Ethiopia. The details are recorded both in Coptic and Ethiopian sources. Sawirus al-Mukaffa relates the story as follows:

"Cosmas (Kusmâ) was consecrated after him (Gabriel) patriarch, and there was manifested in his days a great (and) marvellous thing. This was that he (Cosmas) consecrated a metropolitan (mutrân) from among the monks, for the regions of Abyssinia (al-Habasah) which is a vast country, namely, the kingdom of Saba (Sâbâ) from which the queen of the South came to Solomon (Sulaiman), the son of David (Dâwûd) the king. If the king of it wished to make a tour through it, he would take a whole year making the tour, Sundays excepted, until he returned to his place. It is a country bordering upon India (al-Hind) and the parts near to it. It is included in the see of my lord Mark (Mâri Markus) the Evangelist up to our own day.

When the said metropolitan (mutrân) had come thither—his name was Peter (Butrus) — its (Abyssinia's) blessed king received him with joy. When the death of its king drew near, he (the king) summoned the metropolitan (mutrân) and delivered to him the crown of the kingdom and his two sons and said to him: 'Thou art the vicar of the King Christ, the Great God, by Whose authority are all the kingdoms of the world. Behold, I have delivered to thee my kingdom and my two sons, and I have committed them into thy hands so that thou mayest direct them by the will of the Lord, and upon the one of them whom thou shalt judge to be worthy, gentle and good, place the crown of the kingdom'. Then the king went to his rest. The metropolitan (mutrân) was a wise man and saw that the younger son was more accomplished than the elder one, and he placed upon him the crown and installed him as king. Lo! a monk from the Monastery of Abba Anthony (Anbâ Andûnah) was making a tour round the countries and was passing through the land, and with him a companion, who was making a tour with him, whose name was Victor (Bukṭur). They both penetrated into the lands of Abyssinia (al-Habasah), and presented themselves to the metropolitan (mutrân) and demanded of him that he should give them dînârs and endow them both with some of his money, but he did not give anything to them. Then Satan (as-Saitân) instructed them that one of the two of them should put on the garments of bishops and that the other should act as his disciple. They wrote counterfeit letters, as if from the patriarch, in which they said: 'News has reached us that there has come to you an erring man, whose name is Peter (Butrus), and that he has said about us that we sent him to you as metropolitan (mutrân) and (this) is not correct, and neither are the letters which (he has) with him from us, nor have we consecrated him, but he has counterfeited (as if) from us, what has reached you through his hands.

He whom we really sent is the metropolitan (mutrân) who shall come to you with our letters in his hands. On being informed of this, remove Peter (Butrus) from you and install this (man) Menas (Mînâ) in the see. News has also reached us that he (Peter) seated the younger son of the king on the throne and rejected the elder (one), and this is unjust, because the elder has more right to the kingdom than the younger'. They both went with the letters to the elder son of the king who was alone in a solitary place, and a few people had followed him. When he learned of the contents of the counterfeit letters, he rejoiced exceedingly, and he gathered together the army to him and made known to them the letters and what was in them, and he found thereby a means to make war against his brother. The army joined him, and he vanquished him (his brother) and captured him and banished him, and he banished the metropolitan (mutrân) also, and installed that monk Menas (Mînâ) in his place. After a few days a difference arose between these two false monks, and Victor (Buktur) plundered the cell of the archbishopric (matranah) and took all that was in it and became a fugitive and embraced al-Islâm and wasted all that of which he had got possession in what was not pleasing to God.

When reports of Menas (Mînâ) reached the patriarch and of what he had done in order to banish the metropolitan (mutrân) and to install himself in his place, he (Cosmas) grieved exceedingly and he wrote letters (and) anathematized and excommunicated him. When the king heard of this, he took Menas (Mînâ) the false monk and slew him. Afterwards, the patriarch did not consecrate for them (the Abyssinians) a metropolitan (mutrân) during the remainder of the days of his patriarchate, and neither did the patriarch who sat (upon the Throne) after him, until after five patriarchs, and (this) was Philotheus (Filâtâûs). The biography will make this clear to us when we have need for the knowledge thereof... Then the king ordered that Peter (Butrus) the metropolitan (mutrân) should be brought back to his see, but he found that he had already died in exile. His disciple, (however), had survived, and he prayed (to be allowed) to journey to Misr, but the king did not permit him (to do this), and said to him: 'Thou shalt sit in the place of thy master'. Then he asked the king to allow him to journey to Misr so that the patriarch might consecrate him metropolitan (mutrân), and (that) he would return. He (the king) would not do (this), but clothed him with the garments (of bishops) against his wishes and installed him without consecration. He remained up to the time of the father Philotheus (Filâtâûs), the patriarch, till he became old and very aged, and he used to perform the acts of bishops."¹

The story appears in much the same form in the Ethiopian Synaxar on Megabit the third (thirteenth March):²

"In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, One God. On this day died the blessed and holy Abba COSMAS, Archbishop of the city of Alexandria; he was the fifty-eighth archbishop of that city. This father was righteous, and pure, and exceedingly merciful and compassionate and he was learned in the Books of the Church, and in the interpretations thereof. And God chose him for the Archiepiscopacy, and to sit upon the throne of MARK the evangelist, and he was enthroned in the eighteenth year

of MAKTER, King of Egypt. And having been enthroned he tended the flock of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory! in the fear of God and with wisdom. And he set aside certain of the dues, which were rightly his, and gave them to poor, and the cost of building churches was defrayed by him. When Satan saw fighting the good fight, he did not leave him unhated, on the contrary, he contrived to bring great sorrow upon him, through his own act, in consecrating as Bishop the country of Ethiopia a man whose name was PETER. Now the bishop, A PETER, arrived in Ethiopia, and after he had been sitting a few days, the King of Ethiopia fell sick. And he summoned the bishop, Abbâ PETER, to his presence and brought his two sons before him, and taking the royal crown off his own head he gave it to the bishop, Abbâ PETER, and said unto him, 'Behold, I am going to my Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory! And behold, my two sons are before thee. After my death appoint as king the one of them which thou knowest would the kingdom best.' When the King of Ethiopia was dead, the bishop, and the generals, and the royal army, took counsel together, and it was among them, 'The younger son will be far better for the kingdom than the elder.' And the bishop appointed the younger son to be king, and seated him upon the royal throne of Ethiopia, and the young man sat upon the royal throne for a few days. In those days Satan entered into the heart of two monks from the country of Syria, and they went about from one place to another until they came to the monastery of Abbâ ANTONIUS, and they dwelt therein for a few days, but were driven out because of the evil of their works. And the two of them made an agreement together, that one of them should be made a bishop, and that the other should be his companion. And they rose up, and came to the country of Ethiopia, and forged lying documents which they carried with them, and these documents declared that the two monks had come from father Abbâ COSMAS, Archbishop of the city of Alexandria. And they went on to say, 'We have heard that there hath come unto you a certain man whose name is PETER, and that he hath made himself bishop. But we have not consecrated him, and we have not sent him to you; on the contrary, he is an imposter. Now as concerneth the man who shall come to you with this letter and whose name is MINAS, he is in truth a bishop. We have consecrated him and we send him to you'. And the monks wrote also in that document, saying, 'PETER the false bishop, hath crowned king the younger prince, and hath set aside the elder prince, which thing is not right; PETER is a man of iniquity.' And these two wicked monks, MINAS and VICTOR, before they wrote the forged letter, carried with them PETER, the bishop, and asked him to give them gold, but he would not give them anything whatsoever. And Satan taught them how to carry out this foul and wicked work, and they took the forged letters to the elder prince, who was sitting by him in a certain place, and a few men were waiting upon him. When he had read the forged letters he rejoiced exceedingly, and he gathered together to him a very large number of soldiers, and read the forged letters before them. And he made war upon his brother, the king, and he put him in fetters and he himself reigned (in his stead). And he likewise put PETER the bishop in fetters, and carried him off to a far country, and he seated the impostor MINAS on the episcopal throne in his stead. After a few days the impostors MINAS and VICTOR quarrelled, and VICTOR seized everything there was in the bishop's house, and fled, and departed to the country of Egypt; and he denied our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory! and he wasted all the possessions which he had stolen from the bishop's house in works which were not well-pleasing unto God. And when COSMAS the archbishop heard of what MINAS, the liar, had done, he was exceedingly sorry, and he wrote a deed of excommunication and anathematized and excommunicated him. When the King of Ethi

1. Sawirus ibn al-Mukaffa, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*, trans. Aziz Suryal Attiya et al. (Cairo, 1948), Vol. II, Part II, pp. 118-120.

2. W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, (London, 1928), Vol. III, pp. 666-669.

heard this he was exceedingly sorry, and he seized MINAS the liar and killed him, and he sent a messenger bidding PETER the bishop to return from exile, but they found that he had died in exile. And COSMAS the archbishop was wroth, and he wanted [sic refused?] to consecrate a bishop for the Ethiopians, but his successors Abbâ MACARIUS, and Abbâ THEOPHANIUS, and Abbâ MINAS, and Abbâ ABRAHAM, would not do so. And the King of Ethiopia took the assistant of PETER, the bishop, and said unto him, 'Sit thou instead of thy teacher, and be bishop.' And he entreated the king, saying, 'It is not right for thee that I should do this, and I will not transgress the Canon of the Apostles, but let me go to Egypt, and I will beseech the archbishop to consecrate a bishop for you, and I will return to you.' And the king would not allow him to go to the country of Egypt, but he took him against his will, and he arrayed him in episcopal vestments, and he performed episcopal functions until the days of Abbâ PHILOTHEUS, the archbishop. And Abbâ COSMAS lived to a very old age, and all his days were filled with peace and prosperity. And he sat upon the throne of MARK the evangelist twelve years, and he died in peace."

Basically the Ethiopic version of the narrative is a copy of the Coptic one and therefore there is no substantial difference of detail. It is interesting to note that the Ethiopian text mentions the name of the Egyptian King, Mekter, while omitting that of the Ethiopian. In another Coptic source the name of the Ethiopian king is believed to be Tābtahād̄j or Bābtaha (the translator found difficulty in reading the Arabic text).³ Undoubtedly this is not a title but a proper name, but identification of the king is extremely difficult as the existing lists of kings are both inaccurate and contradictory. The name from the lists which bears some likeness to Tabtahadj is that of Dagnajan, who ruled nineteen years and ten months according to some lists. His reign probably dated from 939 to 950 A.D.⁴ However, consideration must be given to Arab transliteration of Ethiopian names as letters were frequently misplaced in such names. Nevertheless, the mere mention of the Ethiopian king's name is of significance when examining relations between the two countries.

2. The Economic Situation

The stubborn attitude of the Patriarchs of Alexandria did not affect economic relations between Ethiopia and Egypt. As in the past, commerce flourished. Alexandria was the main centre for Ethiopian goods and from there they were dispatched to different parts of the Middle East and Europe. The principal route was through the Suez to Egypt where customs officers levied customs duties.⁵ Dahlak (Massawa) and Zeila⁶ were the active ports for Ethiopian imports and exports. There is evidence that Zeila was an Ethiopian port during this period and that it was an important centre for inter-African as well as overseas trade. Merchants from the Near-and Far-East regularly called there before they proceeded to Qanbloo (Madagascar) by ship or by the land route to Safala (Mozambique).⁷

3. J. Perruchon, "Note pour l'histoire d'Éthiopie, vie de Cosmas, patriarche d'Alexandrie de 923 à 934": *Revue Sémitique*, (1894), p. 84.

4. The list of the kings attached to *Gedle Abreha and Asbeha* at Aksum last fol.

5. S. Labib, *Handelsgeschichte Aegyptens im Spätmittelalter* (1171-1517), (Wiesbaden, 1965), p. 238.

6. Zeila most probably was the Avalites of earlier times. "The first is called Avalites; to this place the voyage from Arabia to the far-side coast is the shortest. Here there is a small market-town called Avalites, which must be reached by boats and rafts." (W.H. Schoff, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, (London, 1912), p. 25; see also F. Benoit, "La Côte orientale d'Afrique au-delà de la Mer Rouge, dans l'antiquité": *Union géographique du nord de la France, Bulletin*, (1896), p. 110.)

7. Sulaiman Nadavi, "Arab Navigation, the Umyyad's period": *Islamic Culture* 16 (1942), pp. 80-81; Ibn Hawkal, *Configuration de la Terre*, trans. J.H. Kramers and G. Wiet, (Paris, 1964), Vol. I, p. 54.

In Zeila, Muslims and Christians lived together⁸ and both groups were tributaries of the Ethiopian Emperor.⁹ The sea between Ethiopia and the land of Zanj was called that time the Abyssinian Sea.¹⁰ Al Mas'udi, however, differentiates between the Sea El-Kolzom (The Red Sea), the Sea of Abyssinia and the Sea of Zanj.¹¹ He indicates that the Ethiopians had their own ships which were built after the manner described by Procopius in the sixth century A.D. "In the Abyssinian sea, iron nails would not be applicable for ship building for the water of that sea corrodes the iron, and the na become thinner and, weaker in the water hence the planks are joined with fibres a besmeared with grease and quicklime".¹² The existence of ships presupposes direct active participation in external trade. It would appear that the Ethiopians exported to East and West alike. The main items for export were ivory, pearls and tiger skins.¹³ Imports particularly from Egypt, included textiles and clothing. Some pieces of linen carpet bearing human and animal figures from the Tulinid (868-905 A.D.) and Ikhshid (935-1009 A.D.) Caliphates have been found in Debre Damo monastery and in Enda Abuna Pentelêw near Aksum.¹⁴ Apparently these carpets were originally quite large. They were used either to decorate the walls of a hall or on the floor. The various colours used in the design include red, blue, green and white. Some show human and animal figures and the design themselves are reminiscent of Coptic art.¹⁵ Three tiraz¹⁶ of the same century with Arabic inscriptions are also preserved in the monastery of Debre Damo.¹⁷ One of these was produced in the Egyptian town of Tinnis (or Tuna) in 905 A.D. during the reign of A. Muktafi billah (A.H. 289-295). The second tiraz, made of red silk, mentions the Abbasid Caliph al Muttaqi billah (A.H. 329-333) and his wazir Sulayman ibn al-Hasan. It was produced in Egypt (al-Fustat) in A.H. 330/941-2 A.D.

From literary and archaeological sources, it seems almost certain that Egyptian coins were minted in both gold and silver. Dinars and dirhams were in circulation in Ethiopia at least in the coastal region where Islam expanded. Al-Muqaddasi comments that: "Ambergris is thrown upon the sea-shore from Adan to Mukha and on the Zai side of the sea also. Whoever finds any quantity of it whether small or large carries it to the agent to the Governor who takes it and gives him in return a piece of cloth and a dinar."¹⁸ Apparently the Arab coins which were in circulation in some parts

8. Sulaiman Nadavi, "Arab Navigation", p. 189. As quoted from al-Mas'udi.

9. Al-Mas'udi, *Les prairies d'or*, text and trans. C. Barbier de Meynard et P. de Courteille, (Paris, 1861/77), Vol. III, p. 34.

10. *Idem*, *Historical Encyclopaedia*, trans. A. Sprenger, (London, 1841), Vol. I, p. 270. In fact the term "Ethiopian Ocean" was known to the western world in much earlier times. Paulus Orosius in the fifth century A.D. stated: "...and behind these extending as far as the Ethiopian Ocean the nations of the Ethiopian people." (*The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans: The Fathers of the Church*, trans. R. Deferrari, Vol. L, (Washington, 1964) p. 18.)

11. Al Mas'udi, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 270.

12. *Ibid.*, *Historical Encyclopaedia*, Vol. I, p. 374.

13. Hadi Hasan, *A History of Persian Navigation*, (London, 1928), p. 127.

14. A. Mordini, "I tessili medioevali del convento di Dabra Dammo": *ACISE*, (Roma, 1960), p. 236 ff. *Idem*, "Un tissu musulman du Moyen Age provenant du couvent de Dabra Dammo (Tigrai, Éthiopie): *AE* 2 (1957), p. 77; D. Matthews and A. Mordini, "The Monastery of Debra Damo, Ethiopia": *Archaeologia* 97 (1959), p. 51.

15. A. Mordini, "I tessili medioevali", pp. 237-238.

16. A Persian word "originally means 'embroidery' it then comes to mean a robe adorned with elaborate embroidery": *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (1929), Vol. IV, p. 785.

17. A. Mordini, "Tre tiraz abbasidi provenienti dal convento di Dabra Dammo": *Bollettino dell'Istituto Studi Etiopici*, 2 (1958), pp. 33-38.

18. *Ahsanu-T-Taqasim fi Ma'rifati-l-Aqalim: known as Al-Muqaddasi*, trans. G.S.A. Ranking, (Calcutta, 1897-1910), p. 153.

of Ethiopia were not of a different type, as in the case of Zabid.¹⁹ Some coins of the Caliph of Ar-Radi billah A.H. 323 (934 A.D.) have also been found in Debre Damo.²⁰ In spite of internal instability and civil wars, trade with Egypt was carried on without interruption throughout the tenth century.

Constant commercial contacts presuppose normal political relations, even if not cordial. In this respect our sources are few but existing ones provide a clear picture of the situation. Ethiopian princes were among those who visited Egypt, particularly during the reign of Mustansir: "The Caliph's (Mustansir's) suite included various princes visiting the court, from the Maghreb, Yemen, Rum, Slavonia, Georgia, Nubia, Abyssinia and even Tatars from Tourkestan...."²¹

The case of Karfur also throws light on political relations between Egypt and Ethiopia. Abu'l Misk Karfur b. Abdallah al Laitial Ikhshidi al Usdad was an Ethiopian²² by birth and his early days were spent in slavery. He was bought for less than £10 by Caliph Ikhshid, perhaps because he was both lame and castrated. In addition, his appearance was not pleasant as he had a split underlip. These physical disabilities, however, did not prevent him from later reaching the highest administrative rank in Egypt. First he was tutor to Ikhshid's sons and it was during this period that his personal merits and intellectual resources were revealed. He soon became the Governor of Egypt with the title of Ustad not Wazir. His administration left a bright spot in Egyptian history. The boundary of the country extended as far as Aleppo and Tarsus, incorporating the whole of Syria. S. Lane Poole equates him with the Roman generals, Lucullus and Maecenas, for military organization and tactics.²³ He encouraged art and literature by making his residence a meeting place for learned men and by becoming a patron of men of letters. Many poets and scholars frequented his house to engage in discussions about their works and about current ideas. Karfur not only listened eagerly to exalted verses but also tolerated and rewarded criticism. "When another poet explained in choice verse that the frequent earthquakes of the time were due to Egypt's dancing for joy at Karfur's virtues, the pleased Ethiopian threw him a thousand dinars."²⁴ Apart from literature, he also enjoyed listening to music. Each day he used to give a grand reception and it is recorded that the quantity of cooked food for one such reception amounted to 100 sheep, 100 lambs, 250f geese, 50 fowls, 1,000 pigeons and other birds; 100 he-goats, 20 big fish, 50 dishes of sweets each containing 20 pounds, 250 dishes of fruit, 10 sacks of dessert, 500 jugs of barley water,²⁵ and 100 of lemonade. The daily consumption of meat amounted to 1,700 pounds.²⁷

His relations with people were harmonious and he did not encounter any disturbances even in times of distress and natural disaster.²⁸ About his relations with Ethio-

19. Hudud Al-Alam, *The Regions of the World, A Persian Geography*, 372 A.H.-982 A.D., trans. V. Minorsky (London, E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, New Series, XI 1937), p. 147.

20. D. Matthews and A. Mordini, "The Monastery of Debra Damo, Ethiopia", p. 51.

21. P.H. Mamour, *Polemics on the Origin of the Fatimi Caliphs*, (London, 1934), p. 147.

22. Sawirus ibn al-Mukaffa, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*, Vol. II, pt. II, p. 128 states that Karfur was a Nubian by birth and further discusses his career as governor of Egypt.

23. S. Lane Poole, *A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages*, (London, 1901 fourth edition 1968), p. 88.

24. *Idem*, *The Mohammadan Dynasties*, (Paris, 1925), p. 69; Ibn Said, *Geschichte der Ihsiden und Fustatensisch-en Biographien*, trans. K.L. Tallqvist, (Helsingfors, 1899), p. 78 ff.

25. S. Lane Poole, *A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages*, p. 88.

26. This may well be the Ethiopian beer, *Tela*, which Karfur was familiar with during his early years.

27. Hassan Ibrahim Hassan, *Islam, a Religious, Political, Social and Economic Study*, (Baghdad, 1967), p. 384; S. Lane Poole, *A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages*, p. 89.

28. *Ibid*, p. 88.

pia, the country of his birth, so far nothing is known. There is, however, reason to assure that the strengthening of commercial ties between the two countries could have been the result of his influence.

The career of Karfur in Egypt lasted for twenty-one consecutive years, nineteen of which were served as virtual ruler and three as actual ruler with the title of Mast. His death, which occurred in 968 A.D., marked the decline of the Ikhshid dynasty.

Ethiopia also enjoyed friendly relations with the Yemen during this period. A point that Arab writers emphasize. Ibn Khaldun states, "The Kings of Abyssinia, on opposite shores, were in the habit of offering him presents, and sought his friendship".²⁹ A Mas'udi furthermore mentions that there was a treaty of friendship between Ethiopia and Yemen which, in fact, helped to intensify commercial activities. Merchants frequented both shores.³¹

The journey from one coast of the Red Sea to the other took only three days by ship³² and commercial exchange with Yemen was largely through Zeila. Business in Yemen at that time was run by foreigners. The bulk of the population of the Arabian Peninsula consisted of Adanite and Khatanite tribes, with their slaves, clients, and allies but there were also large numbers of settlers from Ethiopia, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Persia and India.³³ Some of these expatriates had another administrative function, and many of the chamberlains of pious Caliphs were clients whether originally they were "Persians, Dailemites, Abyssinians or Greeks".³⁴ Yemen enjoyed prosperity as a result of its commercial activities. "As Ibn Khaldun describes: Sa'id says that he had examined a statement according to which the revenues of Abu'l-Jaysh amounted to 1,366,000 'Ashariyah dinars, besides duties levied upon the shipping from Sind, upon ambergris arriving at Bab al-Mandeb and at Aden Abyan, on the pearl fisheries, and besides the taxes collected in the Island of Dahlak".³⁵ The items mentioned were most likely imported from Ethiopia. Slaves were also transported in large numbers to Yemen. On one occasion in A.H. 366/9 A.D., Ibn Ziyad, the ruler of Yemen, received 1,000 slaves, half from Ethiopia and half from Nubia.³⁶ This mass exportation of African slaves to Zebid will seriously affect the political life of the city in the next century.

3. Internal Trouble

In contrast to foreign relations, Ethiopia's dealings with the Beja tribes were not at all friendly. As previously mentioned, the Bejans had invaded Aksumite territory mainly to secure their living.³⁷ Because they were bound by treaty not to attack Egypt they had concentrated on Ethiopia and Nubia. Although the Kingdom of Alodia (Alwa) had concluded a separate treaty of friendship with the Muslims,³⁸ the rest of Nubia and Ethiopia appear to have acted jointly against the Bejans. Al-Muqaddishi observed that

29. *Ibid*, p. 89.

30. Ibn Khaldun, *Yaman, Its Early Mediaeval History*, trans. H.C. Kay, (London, 1892), p. 143.

31. Al-Mas'udi, *Les prairies d'or*, Vol. III, p. 35.

32. *Ibid*, p. 34.

33. Jurji Zaydan, *Umayyads and Abbasids, History of Islamic Civilization*, trans. D.S. Margoliouth, (Leyden, Gibb Memorial Series 1907), Vol. IV, p. 20.

34. *Ibid*, pp. 34-55.

35. Ibn Khaldun, *op.cit.*, p. 143.

36. *Ibid*, p. 143; Yusuf Fadl Hasan, *The Arabs and the Sudan*, (Edinburgh, 1967), p. 49; Hadi Hasan, *History of Persian Navigation*, (London, 1928), p. 127.

37. Ibn Hawkal, *Configuration de la terre*, Vol. I, p. 48.

38. E. Zyhlarz, "I reami della Nubia prima dell'Islam: uno sguardo storico sul Sudan antico e medioevale", *RSE*, 3 (1943), p. 263.

"Between the Bajah, the Abyssinians and the Nubians at Zabid strange relations exist."³⁹ He further adds: "Whilst I was at Zabid the Bajah of that town happened to quarrel with the Abyssinians, and I was deputed by the Qadhi to lead them at the sunset and night prayers."⁴⁰ He was given this role because of the hostility between the national groups.

In spite of these hostilities, the Aksumites appear to have exercised influence over some Bejans. Ibn Hawkal observes that: "These, [the Beja tribes] immediately border on the land of Abyssinia are Christians".⁴¹ Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamadani, who completed his work a few years later in 902 A.D., states that the Bejans used the term *Az-abbiir* for their god. No doubt this is a corrupt form of *Egzi'abher*, a term used for the Christian God in Ethiopia.⁴² This influence obviously resulted from the inevitable communication between the two peoples and from the conquest of the Aksumites in the previous century.⁴³ According to some authorities, this is why the Emperors of Aksum is cited as the "kings of the Bejas."⁴⁴

Arab writers provide us with a general picture of the country. The boundary of Ethiopia in the southeast was the land of Zanj (east Africa), a desert separating the two countries;⁴⁵ in the east the boundary was the Abyssinian-Sea;⁴⁶ in the north, Beja land and in the northwest, Nubia.⁴⁷ The western and southern boundaries are not precisely defined because of lack of information: "...men who are possessed of an extensive knowledge of our globe, say, that the Abyssinians and Sudan (Negroes) occupy a country of seven years' journey."⁴⁸

The country was divided into numerous provinces. The following are named by Al-Mas'udi: Zagawah, Kawkaw, Karkarah, Medideh, Maris, Mabras, Melaneh, Koumati, Doweilah, and Karmah. Each had a king and a residence.⁴⁹ The identification of the names of these provinces presents some difficulties. However, in some cases it may be possible. Zagawah can be identified with the Zagwé or Agaw tribe, or Zaghawa, a semi-nomadic tribe in northern Dāfur.⁵⁰ If this tribe were located in northern Eritrea, this would point to the first-mentioned group. According to A.J. Arkell, the Medideh were "western desert-dwellers called Meded".⁵¹ He also states that "The northern part of Mukurra, previously known as Nobatia, was known as Maris."⁵² Mabra is a place name near Fura located at 13° 33' longitude, 41° 19' latitude.⁵³ Karmah could perhaps be identified with Kerma in the Sudan.⁵⁴ Even this sketchy geographical data indicates that it is difficult to believe that all the provinces listed were within Aksumite territory. Either

39. *Ahsanu-T-Taqasim fi Ma'rifati-l-Aqalim: known as Al-Muqaddasi*, p. 154.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

41. R. Ouseley, *The Oriental Geography of Ebn Haukal, An Arabian Traveller of the tenth Century*, (London, 1800), p. 13.

42. C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, (Bergamo, 1928), p. 270; see also J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in the Sudan*, (London, 1949), pp. 58-59.

43. See above, pp. 207-208.

44. Mahmud Brelvi, *Islam in Africa*, (Lahore, 1964), p. 187.

45. See above, p. 219.

46. Al-Mas'udi, *Historical Encyclopaedia*, Vol. I, p. 237; *Idem*, *Les prairies d'or*, Vol. III, p. 51; Ibn Hawkal, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

47. Ibn Hawkal, *Configuration*, Vol. I, pp. 48-54.

48. Al-Mas'udi, *Historical Encyclopaedia*, Vol. I, p. 377.

49. *Idem*, *Les prairies d'or*, Vol. III, pp. 37-38.

50. J.S. Trimingham, *Islam in the Sudan*, p. 32.

51. A.J. Arkell, *A History of the Sudan*, (London, 1961), p. 154.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 189; cf. J.S. Trimingham, *Islam in the Sudan*, p. 64.

53. A. Bombaci et al., *Elementi per la toponomastica etiopica*, (Napoli, 1937), pp. 123. and 183.

54. A.J. Arkell, *op.cit.*, p. 66; see also J.S. Trimingham, *Islam in the Sudan*, p. 40.

Al-Mas'udi has confused Nubian and Ethiopian territory or he has so transcribed Ethiopian place names that they are unidentifiable.

A number of cities in Ethiopia are mentioned by Arab writers. First there is capital city of Ku'bar or Kobar.⁵⁵ Hudud Al-Alam called it Rusum (Jerami), "a town on the sea-coast and the king's residence".⁵⁶ Al-Battani refers to it as "Kusumi, a city of the regis Kush (Aethiopia)" and locates it at 65° longitude, 11° latitude.⁵⁷ Apparently it means Aksum. Other cities mentioned by Al-Alam include Swar, "the town where the king of the Abyssinian king is stationed".⁵⁸ The following statement of Al-Mas'udi (A.D.) provides more conclusive evidence about Ku'bar: "The capital of Abyssinia is Ku'bar. It is a great city and the seat of the kingdom of the Najashi. The country has many towns and extensive territories stretching as far as the Abyssinian Sea. To it belong the coastal plain opposite Yaman where there are many cities, such as Zaila, Dah and Nasi (i.e. Badi), in which are Muslims tributary, (*dhimmi*) to the Abyssinians."

4. The Impact of the Bishop's Absence

Eventually the internal situation in Ethiopia was undermined by the absence of a Coptic bishop. The bishop's presence had great significance for the general welfare of the country. He was considered a living and visible symbol of the blessing of God and his absence brought wrath and misery to the Empire. As mentioned previously, consecutive Patriarchs—(Cosmas II (921-933), Macarius (933-953), Theophanius (953-956), Menas II (956-974), and Abraham (975-979)—had refused to consecrate a bishop for Ethiopia. During this period, which covers more than a half century, the ecclesiastical duties were partly fulfilled by the assistant of Peter, but the role of the bishop in political life had been abandoned. Only Philotheus (979-1004), the sixty-third Patriarch, consented to consecrate and send a bishop to Ethiopia. The country by that time had entered a very critical period in its history which was interpreted as an expression of the wrath of God because of the absence of a Coptic bishop. The tragic and chaotic situation at that time is described in the letter of the Ethiopian king to the Nubian king, George. Because he had failed to get a bishop from Egypt through direct contact with the Patriarch, he entreated King George to be a mediator. The story is found in both Arabic and Ethiopian sources. The following version appears in *The History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*.⁶⁰

"In his (Philotheus') days, the king of Abyssinia (al-Habasah) sent to the king of Nubia (an-Nūbah), a youth whose name was George (Girgis), and made known to him how the Lord had chastened him, he and the inhabitants of his land. It was that a woman, a queen of Banī al-Hamwiyah had revolted against him and again his country.

She took captive from it many people and burned many cities and destroyed churches and drove him (the king) from place to place. That which befell him was retribution for what the king who (was) before him had done to the metropolis (mūtrān) in the days of the father Abba Cosmas (Anbā Kuzmā) as we have explained earlier, through his falsification and his fraud. He (the king) said to him (George)

55. Al-Mas'udi, *Les prairies d'or*, Vol. III, p. 34.

56. Hudud al-Alam, *op.cit.*, p. 164.

57. Al Battani, *Sive Albanenii, Opus Astronomicum*, ed. C.A. Nallino, (Milano, 1907), pt. II, p. 47.

58. Hudud al-Alam, *op.cit.*, p. 164.

59. J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 51. See also Al-Mas'udi, *Les prairies d'or*, Vol. III, p. 34.

60. Sawirus ibn al-Mukaffā, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*, Vol. II, pt. II, pp. 171-172.

in the letter which he sent to him: 'I desire that thou shouldst help me and partake with me in the fatigue, for the sake of God and for the sake of the unity of the Faith, and that thou shouldst write a letter on thy part to the father, the patriarch, in Misr to beg him to absolve us and to absolve our lands and to pray for us, that God may remove from us and from our country this trial, and may grant to us that he (the patriarch) may consecrate for us a metropolitan (mutrân), as was the custom of our fathers, and that he may pray for us, that God may remove His wrath from us. I have mentioned this to thee, O brother, for fear lest the Christian (Nasrāniyah) religion pass away and cease among us, for lo, six patriarchs have sat (on the Throne) and have not paid attention to our lands, but they (the lands) are abandoned without a shepherd, and our bishops and our priests are dead, and the churches are ruined, and we have learned that this trial has come down upon us as a just judgement in return for what we did with the metropolitan (mutrân).' When the letters reached George (Girgis), the king of Nubia (an-Nûbah), and he had learned of their contents, he sent on his part letters and messengers to the patriarch Philotheus (Filâtâûs), and he explained to him in them all that the king of Abyssinia (al-Habasa) had mentioned to him, and he begged him to have compassion on his people. He (Philotheus) acceded to his request, and he consecrated for them a monk from the Monastery of Abba Macarius (Abû Makâr), whose name was Daniel (Dânyâl), and he sent him to them as metropolitan (mutrân). They received him with joy, and God removed from them His wrath and put an end to the affair of the woman who had risen up against them."

Another version which appears in the Ethiopian Synaxar on Hidar 12 (30 November) is as follows:

"And on this day also died the holy father PHILOTHEUS, the sixty-third Archbishop of the city of Alexandria. In the days of his archiepiscopate the King of Ethiopia sent a letter to GEORGE, King of NOBA, and he said unto him: 'God is wroth with us because of what the kings who were before us have done. For they transgressed the commandment of God, concerning Abbâ PETER, the bishop, whom they drove out of his diocese, and they appointed in his stead MINAS the liar, in the days of COSMAS the archbishop; and behold, six archbishops have [not] appointed a bishop to our country. And because of this our country is destroyed, and all our men and beasts have perished through famine and plague. Our enemies have risen up against us and have carried away captive many men from our country and have plundered our cities. The rain hath been withheld and it falleth not, and the earth will not give her fruit, and our enemies have burnt our cities, and plundered the churches, and driven us from place to place. I beseech thee to shew friendship to me in this trouble, for God's sake, and for the sake of the Orthodox Faith. And do thou write a letter to our father the Archbishop Abbâ PHILOTHEUS of Egypt, and entreat him for God's sake to absolve us, and to open up our country, and to pray for us so that God may remove from us and from our country the tribulation and trial which have come upon us, and may have compassion upon us and may appoint us a bishop, and may send him to us according to what was always done for our fathers, so that the bishop may pray to God on our behalf to remove His wrath from us. And this which I am saying unto thee I say, O my brother king, because I fear [that if a bishop not be sent] the Christian Faith will perish from among us. And behold, from that time unto this day six archbishops have been enthroned, and they have neither remembered our country nor appointed us a bishop. And we have become like unto sheep which have been turned out, and have no shepherd.

Our bishops, and priests, and kings have died, and our churches have been pulled down; but we acknowledge that this tribulation hath come upon us rightly in return for what we did to our Bishop Abbâ PETER.' And when the letter of the King of Ethiopia came to King GEORGE in NOBA, and he had read it, he was exceedingly sorry that trials and tribulation had come upon the country of Ethiopia. And straightway GEORGE, King of NOBA, wrote a letter and sent it to Archbishop Abbâ PHILOTHEUS, and in it described to him all the trials and tribulation which had come upon the country of Ethiopia, and he besought him to have compassion upon the Christian people of the country of Ethiopia and to appoint them a bishop. When the archbishop heard this he sent straightway to the desert of SCETE, to a certain righteous monk, and that monk, whose name was Abbâ DANIEL, came forthwith to him from the monastery of Abbâ MACARIUS, and he appointed him bishop of the Ethiopians and sent him to them. And when Abbâ DANIEL arrived in Ethiopia the people received him with great honour, and he removed the wrath [of God] from them, and he made them to conquer their enemies who had rebelled against them in times past. And all his work was right during the days of this archbishop, Abbâ PHILOTHEUS, and he made manifest many signs and wonders. Salutation to PHILOTHEUS the apostle."⁶¹

5. The Problem of Gudit⁶²

Present day knowledge of the tenth century, limited as it is, might lead us to believe that it was a dark age of Ethiopian history. We lack authentic internal sources to shed light on certain aspects of life in that particular century. It would seem that coins were no longer minted and not a single Ge'ez inscription has yet been found.⁶³ Obviously the main reason for the lack of source material is the internal trouble, which had persisted from the beginning of the same century, attributed to the activities of a certain queen, Gudit. All written sources⁶⁴ as well as oral tradition, so far available, speak of the existence of a cruel queen who in the latter part of the Aksumite period seized power by force. She is credited with having mobilized the first persecution of the Church of Ethiopia⁶⁵ and with having destroyed the monuments and all the artifacts of the city.

Though the sources generally agree about her destructive acts, they are not unanimous about her origin or the motives of her expedition against Aksum. In this section we shall examine the various traditions with respect to Gudit, not so much to solve but rather to tackle the existing problem. In considering the problem of the diverging

61. W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, Vol. I, pp. 233-234.

62. Under this same heading the following portion has appeared in *JES* 10,1 (1972) pp. 113-124.

63. In the previous two centuries, the eighth and the ninth, besides the coins there are also some inscriptions. C. Conti Rossini, "L'iscrizione etiopica di Ham"; *Atti di Reale Accademia d'Italia*, ser. 17, Vol. I (1939), pp. 1-14; see also U. Monneret de Villard, "L'iscrizione etiopica di Ham e l'epigrafia meroitica"; *Aegyptus*, (1940), pp. 61-68. In the ninth century we have the inscription of Hasani Daniel, E. Littmann, *Deutsche Aksum - Expedition*, (Berlin, 1913), Vol. IV, pp. 43-46.

64. The main sources are *Chronicles of Ethiopia*, an unpublished MS. in the possession of Qese Gebes Tekle Haimanot of Aksum, pp. 44-45; *Gedle Abreha and Asbeha*, an unpublished MS. found in Gemad (Tigré) in the church dedicated to the twin brothers Abreha and Asbeha. C. Conti Rossini, compiled various traditions from a number of works and published them under the title: "La caduta della dinastia Zagwé e la versione amarica del Be'ela Nagast"; *RRAL*, Vol. XXXI, ser. 4, (1923), pp. 279-314.

65. The church of Ethiopia had not experienced persecution during the early part of her existence because of the special conditions under which Christianity was introduced into Ethiopia. See Sergew Hable-Selassie, "Church and State in the Aksumite Period," *PICES I* (Addis Ababa, 1966), p. 1 ff.

accounts of her life an unpublished Ge'ez text ⁶⁶ is of some importance:

ወእምነ ንጽሕፍ ታሪክ ዘጉዲት በልሳነ ትግራይ ትሰመይ ጉዲት ወበእምሐራ ትሰመይ እሳቶ ወበልሳነ ጥልባል ትሰመይ ጋዕዋ ። ጉዲት ብሂል ብፅዕት ፤ ብፅዕት ፤ ወመንክርት ። አልቦ ዘይትግለሳ በሰን ወበልሕይ ዘእንበለ ንግሥተ እዚብ ። ወይእቲ ወለተ ወለቱ ለውድማ አስፈሪ ንጉሥ ። ወስመ ሀገረ እግ ጋንደሌ ። ወበእከየ ምግባራስ ዛቲ ተሠምየት ጉዲት በእንተ ዘእውዓየት መቅደስ ጽዮን ገበዘ እከሱም ዘተሐንፅ በወርቅ ወበ ብሩር ወበከደዋ ወሳቲስ ብእሲት ፤ መጽሐት እምሀገረ ሻም ምስል ብእሲ ዘኖሲስ ወተኣየነት በድጥፍ ። ወለእከት ሰቤዮ ጉዲት ገበ ሀገረ እግ ጋንደሌ እንዘ ትብል እነ አእምርኩ ወመጸእኩ ምስል ብዘገ ሠራዊት ። ንፁ ገቢየ ፍጡነ ለተቀብሎትየ ዘኢይመጽእ ጽዮን ገቢየ ኢኮነ ፍቁርየ ወይከውን ምስል ፀርየ ። ወሰሚእሙ ሰብእ ጋንደሌ ወጽኦ ለተቀብሎታ ፍኖተ ኣሳውርታ ወይእቲኒ መጽሐት በሹልኩ ። ወእምቅድሜሁ ኢነበረት ፍኖት በምጽዋ ኣላይኦት አውጽኦቶ ለውእቱ ፍኖት ወሰበ መጽሐት ይእቲ እንተ ኢተሐዘብዋ ፤ ሰመይዋ ለይኦቲ ፍኖት ሹልኩ ወአተወት በዳገና ። ወእንዘ አልቦ ዘይከልእ ወየሐይዳ ወወላት ሀገረ እከሱም ። ቀዳሚ አውላየቶ ለትዕይንት ወለቤተ ክርስቲያንኒ ኣንሐለቶ እስከ መሠረቱ ዘሐነፅዎ ነገሥት አብርሃ ወአጽብሐ ጻድቃን በወርቅ ወበብሩር ወበፅንቶ ። ወለሐውልትኒ ዘሐነፅዋ ጠቢባነ ጽርዕ በብዝነ ንዋይ ገንጸለቶ ወመበረቶ በሐዲን ወለንቅዓ ማይኒ ጸፈነቶ ከመ ኢይሰተይዎ ሰብእ ጸግመ ። ወለሀገርኒ ረስየቶ በድወ ከመ ዘኢነበረ ሰብእ ።

ወአሐት ዕለተ ከመ ታርኢ ብዘገ ሠራዊታ አዘዘቶሙ ለሠራዊት ከመ ይንሥኡ አሐጽ አሐጽ ዕብነ ይዕርጉ ውስተ ዓቢይ ደብር ዘስመ ጉቦ ድሪ ወይግድፍዎ ። ወኮነ ዓቢይ ደብር ። ወእቱ ዕብነ ዘተዓለደ ሁሉ እስከ ይእዜ ። ወእምነ አደቲት ዐዋዴ እንዘ ትብል አብያተ ክርስቲያናት ይትእጸዋ እስመ እነ ኮንኩ አይሁዳዊት ወብ እስየኒ አይሁዳዊ ውእቱ ። ወነግሠት አርብእ ዓመት ። ወእምድንረዝ ኮነ ስደቶሙ ዓቢይ በላዕለ ካህናት ሌዋውያን ወበላዕለ ሕዝብ ። ጽዮንኒ ታቦተ ሕግ ተሰደት ምስሌሆሙ ወበጽሐት ውስተ አሐቲ ሀገረ እንተ መንገል ምሥራቅ ዘትሠመይ ዝዋይ ። ወእንበርዋ በከብር ገብ ማገደር ንጹሕ በጽኑዕ ዑቃሴ መጠነ አርብእ ዓመት ወእምድንረ አርብእ ዓመት ሞተት ጉዲት ወነግሠ አንበሳ ውድም ወኮነ ዛገን ወሰላም ። ወተመይሎ ውስተ ሀገርሙ እከሱምሃ ካህናት ሌዋውያን ምስል ጽዮን ታቦተ ሕግ በዓቢይ ክብር ወበፍሥሐ ብዘገ በተሰዓቱ ምዕት ወዓሠርቱ ዓመተ ምሕረት ። ተፈጸመ ታሪክ ዘጉዲት ።

"Now we shall write the history of Judith. She is called in Tigré language, Gudit and in Amharic, Esato (fire)⁶⁷ and in Tiltal, Ga'wa.⁶⁸ Judith means 'very beautiful. No one can be compared with her in beauty and fineness but the Queen of Azeb⁶⁹ (Sheba). She was the grand-daughter of Emperor Wuden Asferé.⁷⁰ Her mother

country was Hahaylé.⁷¹ Because of her evil behaviour she was called Gudit, for she burned the church of the Cathedral of Aksum which was embellished with gold, silver and diamonds. This woman came from the land of Sham⁷² with the man called Zenobis and camped in Dihono⁷³. Then Yodith sent (messengers) to her mother country, Hahaylé saying, 'I collected and came with many soldiers. Come to me soon and join me. Anyone who will not come is not my friend and (his fate) will be my enemy.' Hearing that, the people of Hahaylé came out to receive her on the way to Assawirta.⁷⁴ And she came through Shiluquwu.⁷⁵ There was no road before from Massawa, she is the first who inaugurated this road. After she had come by a road that they did not expect (therefore) they called that route Shiluquwu. Nobody could stop her or obstruct her way and she entered Aksum in safety. First she destroyed the palace and then the church which was built by Abreha an Asbeha of gold, silver and diamonds down to the foundations. The stelae⁷⁶ which were constructed by Greek craftsmen⁷⁷ and cost so much money were overthrow and broken by hammers. The wells⁷⁸ of water were blocked so that people could not draw from them and the country became a desert as if it had never been inhabited. One day because she wanted to show the number of her army, she ordered each one to go to a high mountain called Gobedra⁷⁹ carrying in his hand a stone and to leave it there. The heap became like a mountain. The heap of stones is found to the present day.⁸⁰ After that she promulgated a decree saying: 'churches should be closed because I am a Jewess⁸¹ and my husband also is a Jew'. She ruled for forty years.⁸² After this (decree) the persecution of the Levite priests and the people was intensified. But Sion, the tabernacle of Law,⁸³ was taken and came

66. I wish to express my thanks and gratitude to *Qese Gebez Tekle Haimanot* of Aksum who kindly allowed me to copy the text from his invaluable chronicle of Ethiopia which he collected from various monasteries and churches and finally compiled as one single chronicle. His position as *Qese Gebez* of Aksum for many years helped him to have good relations with different churchmen thus enabling him to realize his plan. In his compilation he was selective and in many instances he included rare materials.

67. See details in C. Conti Rossini's article: "Aethiopica II": *RSO* 10 (1925), pp. 500-501.

68. This name does not appear in published texts. See C. Conti Rossini, "La caduta della dinastia Zagüe..." p. 280; J. Perruchon, "Note pour l'histoire d'Éthiopie": *Revue Sémitique*, I Année (1893), p. 365. The latter author on another occasion adds 'Tirda Gabaz': "Lettre adressée par le roi d'Éthiopie au roi Georges de Nubie sous le patriarchat de Philothée, 981-1002 ou 1003": *Revue Sémitique*, I Année (1893), p. 71.

69. Judith, VIII: 7, speaks of the beauty of the Biblical Judith. That the Queen of Sheba was beautiful is mentioned in *Kibre Negest*: "A woman of such splendid beauty hath come to me from the ends of the earth" W. Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and her only Son Menyelek*, (London, 1922), p. 30; C. Bezold, *Kebra Nagast, die Herrlichkeit der Koenige*, (Muenchen, 1905), p. 22 (text).

70. According to some chronicles, Wudem Asferé ruled thirty years (792-822 A.D.) and at the same time it is said that he lived 150 years. In this case there is a possibility that the dates could differ by one hundred years. See C. Conti Rossini, "Il libro delle leggende e tradizioni abissine dell' Ecclesiastico Filpós:" *RRAL* Vol. XXVI, ser. 5 (1918), p. 10; *Idem*, "Les listes des rois d'Aksum": *JA*, (1909), p. 16; R. Basset, *Études sur l'histoire d'Éthiopie*, (Paris, 1882), p. 98; W. Budge, *The Life of Takla Haymanot in the Version of Dabra Libanos*, (London, 1906), p. 13. According to a MS. of Azewa Mariam, Zeghe, Gojjam the father of Gudit was Ayzour, an Aksumite emperor who ruled only half a day and her mother was called Mikia Mariam. This emperor was supposed to have ruled some two decades before Wudem Asferé. Cf. above p. 203. n. 115.

71. Hahaylé is a district east of Adua in Tigré.

72. The Arabic name for Syria.

73. Dihono, another name for Arkiko. See O.G.S. Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400-1524*, (C.U.P. The Hakluyt Society, London, 1955), p. 91. There are variations: Dancano, Adicono, Dahono and Arkiko. A detailed and comprehensive comment about this place name is found in the work of L. Ricci, "Le vite di'Enbaqom e di Yohannes, abbati di Dabra Libanos di Scioa,": *RSE* 23 (1967-1968) pp. 190-1; R. Basset, *Études sur l'histoire d'Éthiopie*, p. 275.

74. Assawirta, a region in Southern Eritrea. *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana*, (Milano, 1938), p. 187. In fact it is a name of one of the seven clans of Soho; F.M. Esteves Pereira, *Chronica de Susenyos, rei di Éthiopia*, 2 Vols., (Lisbon, 1900), Vol. II, pp. 412-413.

75. Shiluquwu, an unidentifiable site. The word probably is connected with a word in Amharic and Tigré to slip away.

76. See above, p. 60, ff.

77. *JES* 10,1 (1972), p. 116 n. 15.

78. C. Conti Rossini, *Liber Axumae*, p.1. According to an unpublished chronicle in the possession of *Dejazmach Kassa Mesheha* there were seventy-two such wells in Aksum. This city has two of the three pre-requisites of ancient cities of Ethiopia: 1) it is surrounded by a chain of mountains in semi-circular form; 2) it was built on a plain. It lacks the third-running water.

79. In this place is found an engraved lioness. E. Littmann, *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, Vol. I, p. 32.; See also *DAE*, Vol. II, p.73; U. Monneret de Villard, *Aksum recherche di topografia generale*, (Roma, 1938), p.1.

80. The same tradition is found in Gaynt, Begemidir. See below pp. 231-232.

81. How she was converted to Judaism will explain another legendary source below. Some other sources, however, present her as a pagan queen. *እምነገደ ዕልዋን* J. Perruchon, "Note pour l'histoire d'Éthiopie, lettre adressée par le roi d'Éthiopie": *op.cit.*, p. 370; See also C. Conti Rossini, "Sulla dinastia Zagüe": *Oriente* 2 (1895/96), p. 146. *The Book of the Mysteries of Heaven and Earth* mentions that a queen was ruling over a pagan people who lived east of the Semitic population of Ethiopia in a country called Bali. J. Perruchon, *Le livre des mystères du ciel et de la terre*, (Paris, 1903), p. 25. See also below, pp. 281-229.

82. This is more or less confirmed by a well-known Arab writer, Ibn Hawkal, who states "Cette dernière (Abyssinie) constitue une région bien déterminée et un vaste empire: de nos jours elle est gouvernée par une reine depuis une trentaine d'années". (Ibn Hawkal, *Configuration de la terre*, Vol. I, p. 16.)

83. *Kibre Negest*, (W. Budge, *op.cit.*, p. 148) speaks of the coming of the Tabernacle to Ethiopia: "Zion was taken away from them and she came into the country of Ethiopia."

into a region towards the East which is called Zuway⁸⁴ and was deposited there with all due respect and in a clean and neat house and watched vigilantly for forty years. After forty years Gudit died.⁸⁵ And Anbessa Wudem came to the throne and then peace and order were restored. The Levite priests returned to their country, Aksum, with Zion the tabernacle of Law with great honour and much joy, in the year of Mercy, 910. End of Gudit's history."

The above text does not make clear her motives in leading an expedition against Aksum and her conversion to Judaism. Another chronicle also in the possession of *Qese Gebez Tekle Haimanot* of Aksum provides some details on this matter.

ወሰበ ኃጥአት ሲሳየ ዕለት ቦለት ሀገረ አክሱም ከመ ትንሣሤ አስበ ደነላ ፡ ወሰበ ነፀረ ብእሲ ወሬዛ ወሰ አላ ከመ ይሰከብ ምስሌሃ ወትቤሉ አንተ ካህን ወአነ እምደቂቅ ንጉሥ ወበምንት ትራከብ ፡ ወአውሥላ ወይቤላ ወእቱ ዲያቆን እስመ መንግሥት ወከህነት ዕሩያን እመንቱ ወይቤላ ካሳበ ንግርኒ ዘትፈቅዲ ከመ አምጽእ ለኪ ፡ ወትቤሉ ቅድመ አምጽእ አምሥ ድላለ ወርቅ ወአሣዕነ ዘወርቅ ወበይኢት ትራከብ አንተ ፡ ወይቤላ ቅድመ አምጽእ ለኪ አሣዕነ ዘወርቅ ወድገረ እሁብኪ ወእተ ፡ ዳዕሙ በልኒ እህ ፡ ወአውሥላት ወትቤሉ ሐር አምጽእ ቅድመ ፍጡነ ፡ ወድገረ እነግረከ ፡ ወእቱኒ ተነደፈ በሐፀ ዝመት ወሐረ ውስተ መዛግብቲሃ ለጽዮን ወሰጠጠ መንግሥት ወርቅ መጠነ አሣዕነ እግራ ዘአገበሩ ላቲ ነገሥታት ጸድቃን አብርሃ ወአጽብሐ ፡ ወሰበ ርእይዎ ስብእ ለመንግሥት ወርቅ ስጡጠ ወተብሃሉ በበይቲህመ መት ስጠጠ መንግሥት ጽዮን ወሰጠቱ መጠነ አሣዕነ እግር ወእቱ ፡ ወተጋብሉ ስብእ ትዕይንት ወሐተቱ መጠነ ሠለስቱ ዕለት እንዘ ይጽጽሩ አሳዕነ እግሩ ለሰብእ እንዘ ይከይድ ፡ ዓቢዩ ይከውን ዓቢይ ሥጦቱ ፡ ወእንዘ ይከይድ ንዑሰ ይከውን ንዑሰ ሥጦቱ ፡ ወእምድገረከ መጽአት ጉዲት መጠነት እገሪሃ ወኮነ እሩየ ወእሐዝዎ ስብእ ወይቤልዋ አይድእነ ዘንተ ነገረ ዘከመ እፎ ኮነ በመጠነ እግርኪ ዝንቱ ሥጦት ፡ ወአውሥላት ወትቤሉም እንሰ ሀለወኒ አሣዕነ ወርቅ ዘአምጽእ ሊተ ስብእ ፡ ወወላቱ ኢየ አምር እምብስ አምጽእ ፡ ወይቤልዋ እስኩ አርዲይነ ወአርዐየቶም ፡ ወሰበ ርዕይዎ ኮነ እመነ ወይቤልዋ መት ወእቱ ብእሲህ ዘወሀበኪ ፡ ወነገረቶም ወትቤሉም ዘወሀበኒ አሐዱ ወሬዛ ወእቱ ፡ ወተጋብሉ ዐበይት ሀገር ወሊቅወንት ወፈትሐ ፍትሐ በዘይደልዎ ፡ ወይቤሉ ምንተ ይግበር ዝንቱ ሕፃን እንዘ ምስሌህ እሥራ ዓመት ለእመ ርእያ ሥነ ላገያ ፡ ወይእቲኒ አንበረቶ ከመ ይግበር ዘንተ ፡ ንጹሕ ወእቱ እምዝንቱ ነገር ሕፀፀ መዋዕሊህ ደድገኖ ፡ ወይእቲኒ ይደልዋ ኮነኒ በእንተ ዘተሀበለት ወተሥዕነት መንግሥት ለጽዮን ፡ ወፈትሐ ፍትሐ እንዘ ይብሉ ይምትሩ አጥባቂሃ ዘየግን ወይስድድዋ እምሀገር ወገብሩ ከግህ ፡ ወሰደድዋ ወአውጽእዋ እስኪ ወሰነ ባሕረ ኤርትራ እንተ ይእቲ ወሰነ ምስር ፡ ወረከባ ወልደ ንጉሠ ሻም ዘስመ ዘፍቢስ ወሰበ ርእያ ተሰለላ ወይ ቤላ አይቱ ብሔርኪ ወመት ዘአምጽእኪ ዝየ ፡ ወአውሥላት ወትቤሉ አልብየ ሀገር ወአልብየ ዘመድ እስመ ተገብረ ብዙግ ግፍዕላዕሌየ ፡ ወይቤላ ምንተ ኮነኪ ወአርዐየቶ አጥባቂሃ ፡ ወሰበ ርዕየ ደንገፀ ወገዝነ ወነሥላት ምስሌህ ወፈወላ ቱሰሊሃ ወረሰያ ብእሲቶ ወገደገት ክርስትና ወኮነት አይሁዳዊት እስመ አይሁዳዊ ወእቱ ብእ ሲሃ ፡ ወእምድገረከ ሰባለቶ ጉዲት ለውእቱ ብእሲ ወትቤሉ ለእመ አፍቀርከኒ ንሐር ብሔርየ ከመ ታጥፍእ ፀርየ ፡ ወአውሥላ ወይቤላ አንሰ ኢይክል ሐዊረ ውስተ ብሔርኪ እስመ ኃያላን እመንቱ ነገሥታት ኢትዮጵያ ፡ ወይእቲኒ ኢገደገት ስዒለ ፡ ወትፊት ስብእ ዓይን ለሐውዎ ብሔራ ተመሲሎም ነጋድያነ ፡ ወእሐት ዕለተ ነገርዋ ስብእ ዓይን ከመ ዳግናግን ነግሠ በኢትዮጵያ ፡ ወሰጠረ ዓረብ ወተሀህጠ በጥግ ወሐልቱ ሠራ ዊቱ በጽምእ ግይ ምስለ ንጉሥመ ፡ ወሰጠረግ ጉዲት የበበት እንዘ ትብል እግዚአብሔር ስምዓ ስዕለትየ ወነ ፀረ ግፍዕየ ፡ ወሰከለቶ ብዙኃ ከመ ይሐር ብሔራ ፡ ወእቱኒ አስተጋብእ ብዙኃ ሠራዊተ ወተጽእነ በሐመር ወወጽእ በፍኖተ ምጽዋዕ ወተአየነ በድጥኖ ፡

"When she was deprived of her daily bread she came to Aksum and became a

84. According to tradition the Tabernacle was placed on the biggest island in this lake, Debre Tchen a corrupt form of Debre Sion. On the basis of this legend, the Aksum Sion Church possesses land today near the lake.

85. *Gedle Abreha and Asbeha* attributes her death to divine intervention. She went to the church of Abreha and Asbeha in Gemad and looted everything and then fell sick. Her soldiers put her to bed and took her to Sira'e, east Tigré, where she died and was buried. (From the unpublished MS., p. 109).

prostitute. A young man saw her and asked to sleep with her. She, however, said 'You are a priest and I am from the royal family. How dare you sleep with me. The deacon replied and said: 'State and church are indeed equal.' And further he asked her, 'Tell me what should I bring you? And she said: 'First of all bring the present, a gold veil and golden shoes; only then will you succeed.' He said 'I will bring you first golden shoes and then the rest, but now say yes.' She then spoke and said, 'Go first and bring them quickly and then I will tell you. Since he had fallen in love with her he went to the treasury of Sion and tore from the golden curtain which was donated by the righteous emperors Abreha and Asbeha a piece about the size of her feet. When the people saw that the curtain was torn they asked each other, 'Who has torn the curtain? Its tear is as big as the size of feet.' They assembled at the square and began examining by looking at the shoes of each person for three days. They said, 'If the tear is big the foot print shall be big and if it is small the foot print shall be small'. Gudit came and measured her feet and they happened to be equal to the tear. The people caught her and asked her, 'Tell us how it is that your feet happened to be equal to the tear?' She told them, 'I have indeed golden shoes which somebody gave me and I do not know where from he brought them.' They asked her, 'Let us see them' and she showed them. When they saw it, it was found to be true. Then they asked her, 'Who is the man who gave these to you?' She told them and said, 'The man who gave them to me is a young man.' So the elders and the learned people of the country assembled to pass correct judgement and they said, 'What can a boy under twenty years do when he sees such a beauty. She is the one who put him under temptation to do that. He is innocent of guilt and his age will protect him (from being condemned). She is the only one and solely responsible for the desecration and she made shoes from the curtain of Sion.' They condemned her to cut her right breast and be exiled from the country. The decision carried, they exiled her and chased her to the Red Sea which was the boundary of Egypt. The son of the king of Sham called Zenobis found her and he inquired and asked her, 'Where is your country and who brought you here?' She replied and said, 'I have neither country nor relatives because of much evil done to me.' He asked her, 'What happened to you?' She showed him her (mutilated) breast and when he saw it he was shocked and sympathized with her and took her and cured her wound. Then he married her. She denied Christianity and embraced Judaism, because her husband was a Jew. After that she beseeched her husband and said, 'If you love me, let us go to my country and kill my enemy.' He replied and said, 'I cannot go to your country because the emperors of Ethiopia are powerful'. But she never stopped beseeching him. And she used to send spies as merchants to spy on her country. One day these spies told her that Dagnajan occupied the throne and he had gone to the Arab country where he had perished in the sand because of thirst. When Gudit heard that, she rejoiced saying, 'God has heard my prayer and seen my humiliation.' And she begged him even more to go to her country. He collected his army and embarked on a ship and landed at Massawa and camped at Dihono..."⁸⁶

The main theme of the above legend is confirmed by foreign writers who also provide some additional information. In *The History of the Patriarchs* of the Egyptian Church it is stated: "It was that a woman, a queen of Banī al-Hamwiyah had revolted against him and against his country. She took captive from it many people and burned

86. Since the end of the text is identical to the previous one, (p. 226), I omitted it.

many cities and destroyed churches and drove him (the king) from place to place."⁸⁷ The rise of a certain queen who defeated the emperor is also discussed by Ibn Hawkal.

"As regards Abyssinia, for many years it has had a woman as its ruler. It is she who killed the king of Abyssinia who was known under the title of *hadani* (Eth. *hade*), and she continues to this day to dominate her own country and the neighbouring regions of the land of the *hadani* in the west of Abyssinia. It is a vast limitless country, rendered difficult of access by deserts and wastes".⁸⁸

The first text quoted gives the place of her origin as Bani al-Hamwiyah although the exact location is not mentioned.⁸⁹ Surprisingly the place name is missing in the Ge'ez translation of the same letter in the Ethiopian Synaxar.⁹⁰ In the past, however, many scholars have made considerable efforts to identify the place with an Ethiopian location. I. Guidi interpreted the name as Yahoudya (Jews) while J. Halévy believed it to be Haghouya (Agaws).⁹¹ C. Conti Rossini differed. His view was that it was Damoutah, a region in west Gojjam where a very strong Kushitic kingdom existed until the close of the thirteenth century.⁹² The study of various local sources as well as of the oral traditions leads us to seriously consider the last view. The 'Bali' of *The Book of the Mysteries of the Heaven and the Earth*⁹³ is very close to 'Banu'.

Although the geographical location differs, both texts agree that the woman was a pagan queen.⁹⁴ The following passages may throw some light on the question of her motives in leading an expedition against Aksum.

ወውኢቱ ብሊሲ (ዳግናጥን) አስተጋብሶ ሠራዊቱ "And this man (Dagnajan) recruited an army of about 100,000 and marched against the ምዕራቢያ ለኢትዮጵያ ከመ ይቅኝ ካልኦ ሀገረ land of the Arabs,⁹⁵ west, of Ethiopia to

87. Sawirus ibn al-Mukaffa, *The History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*, Vol. II, pt. II, p. 171; cf. J. Perruchon, "Note pour l'histoire d'Éthiopie, lettre adressée par le roi d'Éthiopie," p. 71.

88. Translation by J.S. Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 52; Ibn Hawkal, *Configuration de la terre*, Vol. I, p. 50.

89. O.G.S. Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400-1524*, p. 82 identifies this place with the name Onno-Ammaya: "a large region south-west of Addis Ababa, between the Gibbe and the sources of the Hawash."

90. W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, Vol. I, pp. 233-234; J. Perruchon, "Note pour l'histoire d'Éthiopie", p. 364 attempts to give various explanations for the exclusion of this name from the Ge'ez version.

91. J. Perruchon, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

92. C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, (Bergamo, 1928), p. 286.

93. See above, p. 227 n. 81.

94. The geographical location "the East" referred to in both the *Chronicle of Ethiopia*, and *The Book of the mysteries of Heaven and Earth*, would be better replaced by the opposite direction "West." According to a chronicle of Zer'a Yacob and Be'ide Mariam, Bali is located adjacent to Dawaro. (J. Perruchon, *Les chroniques de Zara Ya'eqob et de Ba'eda Maryam, rois d'Éthiopie de 1434 a 1478*, (Paris, 1893), pp. 17 and 19. Later geographers confirm that there was a kingdom in the south-west of Ethiopia which was ruled by queens and not kings, one of whom waged war on the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. See O. G. S. Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400-1524*, p. 81.

95. Western Ethiopia. The neighbouring region of Shanqilla is referred to as Arab land. The word appears in the chronicle of Amde Sion. It was an important region with a governor appointed directly by the emperor. Since the word "Arab" is mentioned next to Damot it seems to be an immediate neighbour to this province. (G.W.B. Huntingford, *The Glorious Victories of Amde Sion King of Ethiopia*, (Oxford, 1965), p. 54. In the chronicle of Menelik II we find the following details which is related to the location of the Arabland. ራስ መኮንንም ከወለጋው ገዢ ከደጃች ደምሰው ጋር ወደ ዐረብ ሀገር ያዘዙ በኩል ያለውን አገር ሁሉ ሻንቅላውንና ዐረቡንም አስገብሮ ተመልሶ የገንቦት መባቻ አዲስ አበባ ገባ ። ንጉሥ ተክለ ሃይማኖትም ባገው ምድር በኩል ወደዐረብና ወደሻንቅላው ዘምተው አገሩን አስገብረው ሶረና ከሚባለው አገር ላይ ከተማ ሠርተው ተቀመጡ ። (ገብረ ሥላሴ ሰታረክ መን ዘዳግማዊ ምኒልክ ንጉሠ ነገሥት ዘኢትዮጵያ I (የዳግማዊ ምኒልክ መታሰቢያ ቤት አዲስ አበባ ፲፱፻፶፬ ዓም) ገጽ 285 ።

ተመኪሆ በብዝሃ ሠራዊቱ ። ተውገጠ በጥገ ወኢያኤረ ወኢቱሂ እስመ መሰለቱ ምድር ርሂብ ወኢተመደጠ አሐዱሂ እምሠራዊቱ ዘይዘኑ ዜናሁ ።

Another relevant passage in connection with the same issue is found in a historical note, MS. Arch. 15, in the National Library.

ወአንገሠ ለዳግናጥን በመዋሰሉ ዘአውጽኦ ምእት ወሃምሳ ካህናት አክሱም ገብ አምሐራ ወስመ ጥሙ ደብተራ ። ወአመ ወጽኦ እምትግራ ገብረ መዲና በወይና ደጋ እንዘ ምስሌሁ ሰላ ታቦታት እለ ይዘምቱ ። ለሚሃ ሠራዊቱ ሰትዩ ማየ ፈት እምባሕር ዘምድረ ደርግንዳ እምተከዘ ቀኝ እም ታኸያ ግራ [እ]ምርብ ለመክር ወኢቱ ለዘ[እ] የአምሮ ለብሔሩ ። ዓጲ ርእየ ግባት በርብ ። ወሶበ ጎሉቶ ሐራሁ ተረክቡ ዐሠርቱ ወስመንቱ እልፍ ወሃምሳ ምዕት ለቡሳን ጽሩር አትለምሙ ወወሰ ደሙ ገብ አቡሁ ። ወአቡሁ በከየ በከመ ገደላ ለወ ልዱ ድልገናድ ። ወእምኒሁ ተሐይደት መንግሥት ወተውህበት ለካልናን እለ ኢኮኑ እምእስራኤል ።

"And he crowned Dagnajan. During his time he took 150 ⁹⁶ priests from Aksum to Amhara and named them Debtera. ⁹⁷ When he left Aksum he made his capital in Weyna Dega⁹⁸ and had 60 Tabernacles which accompanied him onto the battlefield. Then his army drank water of Fiq⁹⁹ from the lake in the land of Derginda ¹⁰⁰ Tekezzé (river), right of Tahya ¹⁰¹ and left of Rib. ¹⁰² It is surprising not have known his country. He saw ditches by Rib. When he counted his soldiers he found 18,500 with battle helmets. He ordered them to follow him and took them to his father. And his father wept because he left his son Dil Ne'ad. After him the kingdom was given to others who were not Israelites."

Both texts make it clear that the king undertook an expedition to the west to expand his territory. Apparently the object of the expedition was to secure the old trade route to the gold mine of Fazogli and to permit the exploitation of this precious metal. From the first text one has the impression that Aksum had had no control over this region for a long time and that Dagnajan wanted to assert his sovereignty. But he failed because of natural obstacles. Unless the climatic conditions were different then, there is no vast desert in that direction where he might have perished. But irrespective of the cause of the disaster, I think we should accept the disappearance of a sizeable Aksumite army as factual. It is this which encouraged the queen of that region to undertake a direct expedition against Aksum. Traces of her itinerary can be found in some places. There are, for instance, the two heaps of stones found in Begemidir Governorate-General, between Debre Tabor and Gaynt. The local tradition about these heaps of stones is recounted by H. Blanc, a British captive during the reign of Emperor Tewodros II.

"At Aibankab Theodore halted a few days to rest his men; near it two heaps of stones arise, giving to the place the name of Kimr Dengea [heap of stones]. The story the people of the country narrate with reference to these heaps of stones is that

96. The number given in *Gedle Iyasus Mo'u* is 300. (S. Kur, *Actes de Iyasus Mo'a, CSCO, Scriptores Aethiopici*, (Paris, 1965), p. 19.

97. According to other sources, they acquired the name *Debtera* because the king kept the tabernacles in tents. (C. Conti Rossini, "Il libro delle leggende e tradizioni abissine dell'Ecclesiastie Filpòs", p. 707).

98. A region in Begemidir, east of Gondar.

99. Unidentifiable site in Begemidir.

100. Derginda unidentifiable local name in Begemidir.

101. Tahya country in the region of Selem, Semien. (R. Basset, *Études sur l'histoire d'Éthiopie*, p. 26; C. Conti Rossini, "Catalogo dei nomi propri di luogo dell'Etiopia, contenuti nei testi Gi'iz ed amharina finora pubblicati: *Atti del primo Congresso Geografico italiano*, (Genova, 1894), Vol. II, p. 432. In the chronicle of Susenyos it appears as ታኸያ F.M. Esteves Pereira, *Chronica de Susenyos, rei de Ethiopia*, (Lisbon, 1900), Vol. II, pp. 205 and 213, (text).

102. A tributary of the Nile flowing in a south-easterly direction,

on one occasion a Queen, at the head of her army, went on an expedition against the Gallas;¹⁰³ before starting she ordered every one of her soldiers as he passed along to put a stone on a certain spot, and on her return again ordered them to place a stone at a short distance from the former heap. The first is a large mass, the second very much smaller; the Queen knew by that how great her loss had been, and never since then ventured against the Gallas."¹⁰⁴

It is true that a caravan route between Aksum and the region of Sasu probably Fazogli had existed from early times. Cosmas Indicopleustes in the sixth century A.D. describes how merchants were accompanied by soldiers of Agaw origin to conduct barter trade with the indigenous people of Sasu: "The king of the Axomites accordingly every other year, through the governor of Agua, sends their special agents to bargain for gold and those are accompanied by many other traders—upwards say of five hundred bound on the same errand as themselves."¹⁰⁵ The existence of large groups of Agaw stock in southern Begemidir and northwest Gojjam provides additional evidence.

During the Aksumite period, gold was one of the main items of export. It was also used in the minting of coins for overseas trade. But from the ninth century onwards gold coins became very rare, due perhaps to the interruption of trade with Sasu which must have seriously affected external trade. One can now associate the expedition of Dagnajan with this situation. He wanted to assert his authority in this region through military means and, in fact, personally led the disastrous expedition. The defeat of Dagnajan and the death of his soldiers provided the local queen with an opportunity to counter attack and to invade Aksum. Later the withdrawal of her force from Aksum followed the revival and reorganization of the Aksumite army and its use of superior military strategy. But still it was an ephemeral triumph. Aksum was destined to fall and the seat of power to be removed further to the south.

6. The Decisive Fall

After the death of Gudit, Anbessa Wudem restored peace and order in Aksum. Most probably it was during his reign that the Egyptian bishop was sent by Philotheus to Ethiopia. In the life story (*Gedle*) of Yesus Mo'a we are informed that 618 years after Frumentius another bishop named Selama arrived at the port of Zeila and met the Emperor Dil Ne'ad.¹⁰⁶ On his journey through Ethiopia, the bishop visited the area of Lake Haik in Wello, which was occupied by a pagan population. He was impressed by the location and general surroundings of the lake and sought permission to undertake missionary work there. The Emperor consented to his plan and in the seventh year after his return from Shewa, the king and the bishop went to Lake Haik. There the foundations of the Emperor's palace were laid¹⁰⁷ and the bishop founded the church of Debre Negod-guad in the vicinity of the lake.¹⁰⁸ According to the same source, the famous monastery of St. Stephen was also established during this period. The Emperor summoned three hundred clergy from Aksum to serve in this church: a further indication, coupled with

103. There is no doubt that the event occurred before the immigration of the Galla. In the course of time the old oral tradition has been adapted without, of course, changing the essence of the legend.

104. H. Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia*, (London, 1868), pp. 339-340.

105. H.A. McCrindle, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, (Hakluyt Society, London, 1897), p. 52; O.G.S. Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400-1524*, p. 80.

106. Throughout the text the name of Anbessa Wudem is not mentioned. However, if we can rely on other sources the above quotation should refer to Anbessa Wudem.

107. In another source it is said that the capital was transferred from Aksum to the East. S. Kur, *Actes de Iyasus Mo'a*, p. 18 (text). See also C. Conti Rossini, "Il libro delle leggende e tradizioni abissine dell'Ecclesiastice Filpòs", p. 11; Tadesse Tamrat, "The Abbots of Dabra-Hayq 1248-1535": *JES* 8 no. 1. (1970), p. 88.

108. S. Kur, *Actes de Iyasus Mo'a*, pp. 18-19.

the preceding evidence, that Aksum had lost her role and influence as the political and ecclesiastical centre of the Empire.

The Emperor ruled for twenty years—ten as nominal king and ten as Emperor after his return from exile. Following his death in 910 A.D. he was succeeded by his son, Dil Ne'ad. The latter also intensified his activities in the north. It is said that he built the Cathedral of Aksum Sion and that he ordered other churches to be constructed in the area in order to consolidate the Christian faith which had been shaken by the attempted persecutions of Gudit. Among the churches built by Dil Ne'ad is the monolithic church of Michael Amba in eastern Tigré, the design and decor of which are the work of highly talented architects.

Aksum itself, however, was soon destined to fall. Dil Ne'ad's attempt to restore order was in vain because the pressures he faced were overwhelming. Aksum had successfully resisted every kind of threat for over three consecutive centuries and during this long struggle she had exhausted her spiritual and material resources. There was no alternative—her thousand-year term had finished and now she fell as so many ancient cities had done before her. It was not the result of invasion and occupation nor did the fall of Aksum mean the end of civilization. It was a fall in the geographical sense—Aksum ceased, at that point in her history, to be the centre of Ethiopian civilization but the civilization as such continued virtually unchanged.

The fall of Aksum is obscured by the heavy mists of legend. As yet, we have no other source than the many versions of this legend to draw upon. The two examples which follow we therefore consider to be the most significant of the versions available. The first is taken from the *Chronicle of Ethiopia*, an unpublished manuscript in the possession of Qese Gebez Tekle Haimanot.

ወነግሠ ወልዱ ዳግናጃን አንበሳ ውድም ወነበረ እንደ ያለው አድባር ውስተ አድባር ከመ ያምሱ እምላዲሃ ለጉዲት ቀዳሚ ነበረ ስሙ ግዳጃን ወእምድሃረ ነግሠ ተሰምዮ አንበሳ ውድም ወሓፀ ቤተ ክርስቲያን ዘአክሱም ዘአንሐለቶ ጉዲት ወረሰየ ለትዕይንት ከመ ቀዳሚ ወሓፀ ቤተ መደጠ ወነግሠ ሸ ሞተ ወሞተ ምሕረትጌ ያጃጃ ወነግሠ ወልዱ ድልነዓድ ወኮነ ጽኑዐ ወኃያለ ወነገረ ሱኩ አዕራሪ ወተቀባዩ ኩሉም ታሕተ መንግሥቱ ወመቀዕሊሁ ዛጎን ወሰላም ወሰሚሥ ዘሩህ ሰብአ ግብጽ ወሰብ ጽርዕ ረዕሰ ግብሩ ያተ ጠቢባን ከመ ይርዓዩ ሀገር ወአስማቲህም ኬርሚስ ዘጽርዕ ወሳሊም ሲተርስ ዘግብጽ ወርዕዩ ለሓውርቲሃ ለኢትዮጵያ ወዶዱ አድያሚሃ ወመጽኡ ጎበ ንጉሥ ወይቤልዎ ለንጉሥ ብሔርከስ ሠናይገ ይላቲ ዳዕሙ ጎዕርት በማይሰውሥሎም ወይቤሎም በምሥራቅ ወበሰሜን ሀላባ ባሕር በምዕራብ ወበደቡብ የብሔራት እስከ ተፋጸሟት ወይቤልዎ ለሙንቱ ጠቢባን ረዕሰ ሰብአ ከመ ታላምር ወነዋቹ ሊቃናት ሓራሁ ለንጉሥ ወረዕሰ ምስላ ሠራዊት ብዙግ ጅዱ በፍኖተ ሸዋ ጅዱ በፍኖተ እናርያ ወጅ በፍኖተ ስናር ወሓሩ ወነበሩ እንደ ዮሥሐውጃቱ ተመደሙ እንደ ሃዕቡም ፍኖተ በድው ወጅዱ ሓረ መንገል ደቡብ እንደ የገሥሥ ወረከበ ባሕር ወሰሙ ወእምድሃ ትእምርተ ዘበቄል ቄሎማ ወጅ ቄሎማ ኑጉ በእመት ፃ ወሰብ ርእየ ንጉሥ አንከረ ወተደመ ወይቤሎም ለውላቱ ላእክ ዳግንጉ መጸእክ ወይቤ እው ዳግን መጸእኩ በገይል እግዚአብሔር ወተምግ ንጉሥ ወይቤ እኩ በገይል እግዚአብሔር ዘመጸእክ ላላ በገይል ዚእየ ውላቱ ወእውሥላ ውላቱ ላእክ እኩ በገይል ዚእለ ላላ ዐቀብጌ ገይል ለምሳኪየ በፍኖተ በድው ወተምዐ ንጉሥ ሶቢሃ ወእሠር ወዋቅሖ ወሰሚሥ ዘንተ እቡ ብፁዕ ለምሳክ መነኮስ ጸድቅ መጽእክ ከመ ይገሥዎ ወእስምግ ቃሉ ውላቱ ንጉሥ ወይቤሎ ውላቱ መነኮስ በእንጉዝተ ሐበልክ ትንብብ ቃለ ጽርዕት ላዕለ እግዚአብሔር ወተአደውክ ትእዛዛ ይመስለከኩ ዘንገሥክ በኃይልክ ያረ ረሰሰት መንግሥትክ ለወለትክ ወዘንተ ብሂሎ ተሰወረ እምላዕይንቲህ ወተከዘ ንጉሥ በእንተ መንግሥት ወገደፋ ለወለቱ ዘቹ እውራሳ ውስተ ዐቢይ ፀድፍ ወድዮ በመሰብ ወርቅ ወሀላወ ጅ ላእክ በውስተ ቤቱ በቤት መንግሥቱ ዘበሙ መራ ተከለ ሃይማኖት ወጽኦ እኒዞ ክልበ ከመ ይንግዱ ቅቅሖመበጽሐው ውስተ ይእኩ መካን ወርዕዩ እግረሃ እንደ ትልሕስ ይላቲ ክልብ ለመሰብ ወርቅ ያረዕከበ ክልበ ጎቢሃ ወሓረ በጉጉግ ውስጥ ፀድፍ ወረከበ መሰብ ወርቅ ወእርጉም ውላቱ መሰብ ረከበ ወለተ እንደ ታበርህ ከመ ፀሐይ ወተረሥሐ ከዐርዕዩ ወእእኩፍ ለእግዚአብሔር ወወሰዳ ለይላቲ ወለት ጎበ ቤቱ ወይቤሎ ንጉሥ ምንተ ነግዱክ ዮም ወእላ

ሥላ ወ-እኑ ላእክ አልቦ ዘረከብኩ ባሕቱ ካልዓ ንዋየ ረከብኩ እንጉሥ ባርከ ሊተ ወይቢ ንጉሥ ምንትኑ ዘረ ከብክ ከመ እባርከ ለክ ወአግሐስ ሰብአ ወንገር ለባሕቱ ረከብኩ ወለተ በውስተ መሶበ ወርቅ ግድፍተ ውስተ ፀድፍ ወሰሚያ ንጉሥ ደንገፀ ወተደመ በእንተ ዘኢሞተት እስመ ኮና ሰባ-ዓ መዋዕለ ወለትየ ይእቲ ዘወለድ ከዋ እምአዝማድየ ወከመ አይሰማዕ መኑሂ አዕድፍከዋ ውስተ ጸድፍ ወበእንተዝ ነገር አምሐሱ ከመ አይንግር ለመኑሂ ወሀቦ ሢመተ ራብዕተ እዴሃ ለላስታ በዘየሐዕና ለይእቲ ወለት ወሐፀና መራ ተክለ ሃይማኖት ሠናየ ሕፅነተ ወሶብ ኮና ኃወጃ ዓመተ አእመራ መራ ተክለ ሃይማኖት ለይእቲ ወለት ወተምዕት ይእቲ ወለት ወትቤ በይነ ምንት ተዓደውክ ወተሀበልክ ተአዛዘ ከመ ትግበር ዘንተ ምግባር ርከሱ በላዕሌየ እምይእከስ ይኒይስኒ መዊት እምእግበር ዘንተ እስመ አንተ አቡየ ወ-እኑ ነገራ ወይቢላ አኩ አነ አቡኪ አላ አቡኪስ ድልነአድ ንጉሥ ወረ ከብኩኪ በውስተ ጸድፍ ተግዲፈኪ በመሶበ ወርቅ ወሰመይኩኪ መሶበ ወርቅ ወይእቲኒ ሰሚዓ በከየት ወትቤ ምንተ ዓመተ ተረከበ ላዕሌየ እንዘ አነ ንዑስ ሕፃን ዘዩ አውራጎ ወነዳያንሰ ተፀኒሶሙ የሓፅ ውሉደሙ እንዘ አነ ወለተ ንጉሥ ተገደፍኩ በውስተ ፀድፍ ወዘንተ ብሂላ አንቃዕደውት አዕይንቲሃ ገብ እግዚአብሔር ወሶቤሃ አስተርእያ መልክ እግዚአብሔር ተመሲሎ ሰብአ ወይቢላ ለምንት ትተክዚ ወተንዝኒ ወትበክዬ ፈድፋዶ እስመ ናሁ ተውሀበ ለኪ መንግሥተ ወለውልድኪ እምይእከስ ተአበዩ ወትከብሪ ወእምዝንቱ ብእሲ ትረከቢ ዘርዓ ሠናየ ወኢትዓደዊ እምትአዛዘ ወዘንተ ብሂላ ተሠወረ ወ-እኑ መልክ እምአዕይንቲሃ ወሶብ መጽአ ምታ ነገረቶ ነኩሉ ዘኮነ ወትቤሉ እምይእከስ ኢትትቀነይ ለዝንቱ ንጉሥ ወለእመ መጽአ ገብኪ አንተ ትመውዶ ወእምዝ ለእክ ገቤሁ ንጉሥ እንዘ ይብል ነዓ ወ-እኑኒ አመክነየ ምክንያተ ደዌ ወለእክ ካዕቦ ሥልሰ ወእበየ ሐዊረ ወእምዝ ተምዐ ንጉሥ ወኢነወ ሊቀ ሐራሁ ምስለ ሠራዊት ከመ ይፅበዖ ወምዖ ለሊቀ ሐራሁ ወካዕቦ ለእክ ዘየዐቢ እምሠራዊቱ ወለውእቲኒ ሞዖ ወሥልሰ ተንሥኦ ንጉሥ እንዘ ያስተጋብሶ ሠራዊቱ ወለንጉሥኒ ሞዖ ወገዮ ንጉሥ ወ-እኑኒ ዴገኖ ደንገራሁ ወእንዘ ይጉይይ ንጉሥ ረዝዘ ዘባኖ ወእሐዞ ወይቢሉ መኑ ረዝዘ ውእቲኒ ይቤሉሙ ዘእንጉየኒ ውእቲ ረዝዘኒ ዲብ ዘባንየ ወበ እንተዝ ተሰምየ ካጌ ብሂላ ዘእንጉየ ንጉሥ በእንተ ትእቢቱ ተሐደደ መንግሥቱ ለዝንቱ ንጉሥ ወዝንቱ ሐነዓ ለመቅደስ እስጢፋኖስ ዘደሱት ሐይቅ ወክሉ መዋዕለ መንግሥቱ ኃወጃ ዓመተ¹⁰⁹ ወዓመተ ምሕረትኒ ዘጃጃወጃ ።¹¹⁰

"His son Dil Ne'ad became king and was strong and powerful. His enemies submitted to him and were subdued under his power. His reign was full of tranquillity and peace. Hearing of his fame, the people of Egypt and Greece sent two wise men to visit his country. The Greek was called Kermes (Hermes) and the Egyptian, Alim Petros. They saw the regions of Ethiopia and toured its provinces and then returned to the king and said: 'Oh king, your country is beautiful but it is encircled by water.' He replied and said, 'On the east and north (indeed) there is sea, but on the west and south it is land until its end.' The wise men told him 'Send people to verify that.' Then he sent three of his military leaders with many soldiers (to three different directions), one towards Shewa, another towards Enarya and the third towards Sennar.¹¹¹ They went and explored. Two of them returned because they were hindered by the desert. One went towards the south for exploration and found a fresh water lake. As a sign of (his success) he brought with him a tall reed which measured forty cubits. When the king saw that he marvelled and was astonished and said to the messenger, 'Did you return safely?' And he replied, 'Yes, I returned safely by the power of God.' The king became angry and said: 'Not by the power of God did you return but by my own power.' The messenger answered: 'Not by your power, rather the power of my Lord protected me in the wilderness.' Then the king became angry and put him in jail and shackled him. Abuna Besu'a Amlak¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ According to other sources, Gudit ruled for forty years. Anbessa Wudem was an infant king at that time, thus if one includes that period, his whole reign should exceed fifty years.

¹¹⁰ *Chronicle of Ethiopia*, MS., pp. 26-27.

¹¹¹ From the fifteenth century onwards traces of these routes still existed. O.G.S. Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400-1524*, see particularly maps Fig. 13 and 18.

¹¹² The reference to Abuna Besu'a Amlak is an anachronism. He was a monk who lived towards the close of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth century. (C. Conti Rossini, "Besua Amlak e il convento della Trinità": *RRAL*, ser. 5, Vol. XI, (1902), p. 389. On p. 427 there is reference to the meeting between Besu'a Amlak and the Emperor Naod (1494-1500). Perhaps the inclusion of the former in the legend is due to a later copyist's desire to acknowledge his own favoured saint rather than the actual contemporary one.

the righteous monk, heard about this and came to rebuke him but the king failed to listen to him. Then the monk said: 'Because you dared to utter blasphemy, against God, you transgressed his order. You think that you became king by your own effort. Now your kingdom is passed on to your daughter¹¹³. After he said that he disappeared from his sight. The king sorrowed for his kingdom and threw his daughter of three months into a big ditch having put her in a basket.

"There was a servant in his chambers in the palace named Mera Tekle Haimanot¹¹⁴ (This man) went out with his dog to hunt partridges and came (near) to that site. He saw the dog licking the feet of Mesobe Werq. He sent again the dog to her and he himself went hastily to the ditch and found a basket and when he opened it he discovered a girl who shone like the sun. When he saw her, he rejoiced and praised God and took the girl home. The king asked him, 'What did you hunt today?' The servant replied, 'I found nothing (to hunt) but I found something else. Oh king allow me to keep it.' The king enquired saying, 'What did you find so that I may approve it for you?' He asked (other) people to leave and then privately told him saying, 'I found a girl in a basket thrown in a ditch'. When the king heard that he was shocked and surprised that she did not die although several days had elapsed. And the king told him, 'She is my daughter. I had her from my relative. So that no one may know I had her thrown into a ditch.' About this matter he made him swear not to tell anybody and appointed him over a quarter of Lasta so that he could support the girl. Mera Tekle Haimanot brought her up properly. When she became fifteen years old Mera Tekle Haimanot knew the girl. The girl became angry and said, 'Why have you transgressed and rejected the law¹¹⁵ and done this dirty thing to me?' From now on it would be better for me to die than to do this; for you are my father.' And he told her saying, 'I am not your father. Your father is King Dil Ne'ad. I found you in a ditch thrown there in a basket and this is why I named you Mesobe Werq'.¹¹⁶ When she heard that she wept and said, 'What kind of crime did I commit when I was a baby of three months? Even poor people bring up their children in great poverty. Yet I, the daughter of the king was thrown in a ditch.' Having said that she raised her eye to God. At that moment an angel of God appeared to her in human form and said to her, 'Why do you sorrow, weep and cry so much? Behold, the kingdom is given to you and to your children. From now on you will be exalted and respected. You will get a virtuous seed from this man and do not transgress his order. Having said that, the angel disappeared from her sight. When her husband came she told him everything that happened (further) she said, 'From now on do not pay allegiance to this king. If he come against you, you will defeat him.' The

¹¹³ The version according to *Gedle Yared* differs slightly. "And king Dagnajan the Israelite ruled Ethiopia by the power of God and visited it from one border to another. One day as the King was giving reception. The priests came and praised him saying: 'Behold that God has done you such a miracle to meet [again] your wife on the anniversary of your marriage after you had visited the borders of Ethiopia.' Then Satan inspired arrogance in the King and said: 'Behold when are you going to speak about my power?' Because of these words his kingdom was taken and given to his servant Mirara." (C. Conti Rossini, *Acta Yared et Pantalewon, ESCO, Scriptorum Aethiopicorum*, Vol. 9, (Louvain, 1904), p. 2 (text).

¹¹⁴ Otherwise in abbreviated form as above Mirara (ምራራ) or Morara (ሞራራ), Mera (መራ) or (መይራ) Meyrari.

¹¹⁵ In such cases, *Fetha Negest*, the old political and ecclesiastical code is very strict: the punishment death by the sword. I. Guidi, *Il "Fetha Nagast," o "Legislazione dei re,"* (Napoli, 1936), p. 312 (text). Abba Paulos Tzadua, *The Fetha Nagast, The Law of the Kings*, (Addis Ababa, 1968) p. 297 (English trans.).

¹¹⁶ According to other traditional sources her name was Terdi'a Gebez.

the King sent to him saying, 'Come.' But he refused on the ground of sickness. He (the King) sent for him a second and a third time but he refused to go. Then the King became angry and sent his military leader with soldiers to fight him. He (Mera Tekle Haimanot) having defeated the military leader, next the King sent more soldiers with (a leader); he defeated them as well; the third time the King himself rose, having gathered his army, but he defeated the King also. The King retreated but he (Mera Tekle Haimanot) pursued him. While the King was fleeing he pierced his back and caught him, and asked him, 'Who pierced (your back)?' And he (the King) replied, 'The one who pursued me pierced my back.' This is why he was named Zagwé which means—the one who pursued the king.¹¹⁷ Because of this arrogance the kingdom of this king was given away. He built the church of Stifanos on the island of Haik. The full period of his reign was fifteen years and the Era of Mercy was 925.¹¹⁸

There are slight differences in the version of the legend found in *Gedle Iyasus Mo'a*, which is summarized below:

Dil Ne'ad had a daughter named Mesobe Werq whom he loved much among his children. The learned and wise men told him that whosoever will marry your daughter will deprive you of your kingdom. To avoid this, the King kept her alone in the palace and forbade anyone to visit her room except those who were in charge of her. There was a man from the Agaw of Lasta who finally succeeded in becoming good friends with the Emperor. This man was a brave officer who distinguished himself on the battle field against people in all parts of the Empire. His name was Mera Tekle Haimanot. His friendship with the Emperor enabled him to enter into his private room where he eventually became acquainted with the daughter and she explained to him the cause of her isolation.

Mera Tekle Haimanot fell in love with the princess at first sight and the same happened to Mesobe Werq, and she told him how he could take her as his wife. She informed him that her father, the King, suffered from a disease which could be relieved only if he sat near a fire and someone scratched his skin to soothe him. At that moment, he reached such ecstasy that someone could ask him anything and it would be granted with pleasure. The princess advised the officer to apply this method. One day when the King was sitting near the fireplace, Mera Tekle Haimanot began scratching the body of the King and meanwhile asked him for his daughter's hand. The Emperor approved, whereupon Mera Tekle Haimanot asked the Emperor to assemble all the town dignitaries and announce the decision in front of them, and this was done. The officer did not delay in taking the princess to his country. As usual, the Emperor slept after his body was sufficiently warmed by the fire.

The next day, when he regained consciousness, he asked for his daughter, but to his surprise he was informed of what had taken place the day before. He immediately sent a messenger to Mera Tekle Haimanot, telling him to return his daughter on the grounds that he would give her back officially after a marriage ceremony. He said that a good officer like he was, should not use such base methods to marry the daughter of the Emperor. But Mera Tekle Haimanot knew the intention of the Emperor and refused to return Mesobe Werq.

117. Zagwé is supposed here to derive from "ገገግ" which means "he who pursued."

118. This date should be advanced by an additional 100 years for the reason suggested above, p. 213 n. 114.

The Emperor had no other choice than to use military means to regain his lost daughter, and even this failed and the sovereignty passed into the hands of Mera Tekle Haimanot.¹¹⁹

The legend indicates clearly that the new dynasty was closely connected with the former one, as Mera Tekle Haimanot lived and was raised to the highest military rank in the Empire. The marriage implied both continuity and the continuing influence of the old dynasty.

Perhaps one can uncover the factual core of this legend by referring to other available sources. The Agaw people appear on the scene as early as the sixth century A.D.¹²⁰ Cosmas recounts that Emperor Caleb assigned them the very difficult task of accompanying the merchants who were travelling to Sasu,¹²¹ a gold producing region in the west. Apart from their original location in Lasta, they were also found in three major provinces: Halhal Bogos in Eritrea; Dembya in Begemidir, and Agaw Midir in Gojjam. These regions were of great economic and strategic importance. The land trade route to Egypt was through Halhal Bogos. When at a later period it was threatened by the invasion of the Beja tribes, it became necessary to station there the people most experienced in military affairs, such as the Agaws, to protect the merchants and defend Aksumite territory. The same purpose was served by stationing the Agaws in the west, in Begemidir and Gojjam. Gold was produced in the area and the pagan kingdom of Damot—a rival of the Aksumite Empire—was located nearby. Whether they effectively accomplished their duties is not known, but their active involvement in the economic and military life of the country undoubtedly led them to power.

119. *Actes de Iyasus Mo'a*, pp. 25-27 (text).

120. Traditional Ethiopian sources emphasize that the Agaw people were as old as the Semitic ethnic group *Aleqa Taye*, *A History of the Ethiopian People*, (Addis Ababa, 1948), fourth ed., p. 28 (Amharic); *Behane Meskal Desta*, *Zena Lal Yibelal*, (Addis Ababa, 1951), p. 28. (Amharic).

121. H.A. McCrindle, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, An Egyptian Monk*, (Hakluyt Society London, 1897) p. 52.

CHAPTER XI

THE ZAGWÉ¹ DYNASTY

1. The First Stage

There are a number of possible derivations of the word *Zagwé*. Some writers claim that it is an abbreviation of *Zewge Michael*, the Christian name of *Mera Tekle Haimanot*, the founder of this dynasty. Others believe that it derives from *Agaw*, the place where the tribe originated while a third view noted on p. 236 is that the word derives from the Ge'ez verb አጥየየ meaning "to pursue, to chase or to persecute". *Zagwé* would therefore mean "persecutor".² The second explanation seems the most probable since the previous dynasty also took its name from a locality and, more specifically, a capital city *Aksum*. As a capital city which could symbolize the whole empire had not yet been established by the *Zagwé* they took instead the name of the region where the tribe of the dynasty originated – the north-central part of Ethiopia.

With regard to the re-location of the capital city in this region, the *Aksumites* themselves probably contributed to this change. As we have seen above,³ according to traditional and written sources, we find two references to the move of the capital city, in both cases, to the south. First there is the flight of *Dil Ne'ad* to the south following the rise of *Gudit*. Secondly there is the reference in *Gedle Yesus Mo'a* to the arrival of *Anbessa Wudem* in the region of *Haik* and the founding of a city there. In the latter case the reason for the change of location of the capital is not mentioned but we can assume that pressure from enemies both within and outside the empire forced the move.

As a rule, a change of dynasty results from force but as we do not know when the *Zagwé* dynasty assumed power we cannot be certain in this case. There is little agreement among the available secondary sources as to the duration of this dynasty: figures vary from 133 years to 375 years.⁴ However, we do know that it ended in either 1268 or 1271. In attempting to date the commencement of *Zagwé* rule, two important sources are the description of *Ibn Hawkal* and the letter of *George of Nubia* to *Patriarch Philotheos*.

1. There are three main variations of the name in Ethiopian literature. In *Gedle Yared*, p. 23 it appears as ዳግ whereas on p. 26 (text) it is written ዳግዬ. In *Actes de Iyasus Mo'a*, it appears as ዳግ on pp. 25, 27, 28; the same is true in *Gedle Tekle Haimanot*, (Addis Ababa, 1946), pp. 28 and 83. In *Kil Negest*, ed. C. Bezold (Muenchen, 1905), p. 172 it appears thus: ዳግ. In *Actes Margarewos, CSC Scriptores Aethiopici*, ed. C. Conti Rossini, Vol. 22. (Paris, 1904), p. 13 it is written ዳግ; *Idem*, "caduta della dinastia Zagwé e la versione amarica del Becela Nagast": *RRAL*. Vol. XXXI, ser. 4, 19: pp. 280 and 311. In some works the dynasty appears as ዳግግ; *Actes de Iyasus Mo'a*, pp. 25, 26, 27 and 55 or as ዳግግ *Gedle Tekle Haimanot*, pp. 77 and 87.

2. According to C. Conti Rossini, the word *Zagwé* derives from a word in *Agaw* language which signifies "king or principal": "Sulla dinastia Zāguē": *Oriente* 2 (1895/96), p. 152.

3. See above pp. 230-231

4. C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, (Bergamo, 1928), p. 303.

Both agree that the rise of Gudit took place in the second half of the tenth century between 970 and 980 A.D.⁵ But her rise to power did not necessarily mean the end of the Aksumite dynasty. In fact, the Aksumite Emperor attempted to ensure the survival of his dynasty for some time. If we accept that her reign lasted for forty years followed by the ten years under Dil Ne'ad plus a further probable fifteen years, we can calculate that the Zagwé dynasty began between the years 1030-1050 A.D.⁶

In addition to the lack of information about the exact date of the beginning of the Zagwé dynasty, the number of monarchs who ruled the country during this period is also unknown. The three lists of Emperors are found below:

Short ⁷	Long ⁸	Years of Reign
1) Mera	1) Mera Tekle Haimanot	3
5) Yimreha	2) Tetewudem	40
3) Lalibela	3) Jan Seyoum	40
4) Ne'akuto Le'ab	4) Girma Seyoum	40
5) Harbé	5) Yimrehane Kristos	40
	6) Harbé	40
	7) Lalibela	40
	8) Ne'akuto Le'ab	48
	9) Yitbarek	40
	10) Meyraray	15
	11) Harbai	18

Longer ⁹	Years of Reign	Date
1) Mera Tekle Haimanot	13	(920-933)
2) Sibuhay, Dil Ne'ad II	10	(933-943)
3) Meyraray	15	(943-958)
4) Harbey, Hareyene Egzi	8	(958-966)
5) Mengisine Yitbarek	7	(966-973)
6) Yi'kebke Egzi	10	(973-983)
7) Zena Petros	6	(983-989)

5. E. Cerulli, "L'Etiopia medievale in alcuni brani di scrittori Arabi": *RSE*, 3 (1943), p. 274.

6. In *Be'ela Negest*, *The Wealth of Kings*, it is stated: "and they reigned for 133 years, 700 years from the bringing of the Faith to Ethiopia (AD=1033)": G.W.B. Huntingford, "The Wealth of the Kings and the End of the Zagwe Dynasty": *BSOAS* 28 (1965), p. 1 ff. In the list of kings attached at the end of *Giorgis Welde Amid* an early 17th century MS. of Aksum Cathedral, Fol. 39a, it is stated that "ለፍላስት መንግሥት ትርፋዕ ገበዝ ገበ ዛን ወንግሥ ደጃፂ (sic) ዓመት በ፯፻ ዓመት እምነተ (sic) ኢትዮጵያ ወበ ፲፩፻፵፱ ዓመት እምልደተ እግዚእነ Tird'a Gebez had removed the kingdom to Zagwé and they reigned 143 (sic) years. On 700 years from the conversion of Ethiopia in 1134." In spite of chronological discrepancy the mentioning of the date 1134 is an important fact. It supports the view of those who accept as the commencement date of the Zagwé Dynasty the year 1148. See C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, p. 303; J.S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, (London, 1954), p. 55; J. Doresse, *Ethiopia*, (London, 1959), p.93; E. Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*, (London, 1960), p. 64.

7. C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, p. 305.

8. *Ibid.* In another work by the same author nine names are listed 1) Pentew, 2) Pentedim, 3) Jan Seyoum 4) Jan Girma 5) Harbé 6) Lalibela 7) Ne'akuto Le'ab 8) Yimrehane Kristos 9) Yitbarek: "La caduta della dinastia Zagwé", p. 295. The same list is found in Ethiopian MS. Or. 1773.8, Cambridge University Library: "በገዢ ገንጋልቶ ፊደሌ፣ መንግሥቶች፣ ወለስግቲቶች፣ ለመንግሥት ሳጊ ፡ በከመ ፡ ሰማዕት ፡ እግዚአብሔር ወገዕ ፡ We count the length of the reign of the Zagwé Kings as we learn it from tradition."

9. Tekle Sadik Mekuria, *Ya Ityopya Tarik: Nubia Aksum Zagwiye*, (Addis Ababa, 1951 E.C.), p. 356. This list seems to be more comprehensive as it includes Zena Petros and Be'mnet who are mentioned in literary works.

8) Bahr Saf	14	(989-1003)
9) Tetewudem, Ser Assegid	10	(1003-1013)
10) Akotet, Jan Seyoum	20	(1013-1033)
11) Be'mnet, Girma Seyoum	20	(1033-1053)
12) Yimrehane Kristos	40	(1053-1093)
13) Gebre Mariam	40	(1093-1133)
14) Lalibela	40	(1133-1173)
15) Ne'akuto Le'ab	40	(1173-1213)
16) Yitbarek	40	(1213-1253)

The names in the short list are not only fewer in number but are also abbreviated. The reverse is true of the other two lists. If the duration of this dynasty is approximately 300 years, it is probable that the third list would seem the most accurate. For the most part, however, we do not have any recorded history of these emperors and the legendary sources are rare and inadequate. This lack of source material is a result of the view of the Ethiopian church that the Zagwé dynasty was illegitimate and a usurper. The chroniclers were churchmen thus their record of the whole period is usually summed up in one sentence: "The Kingdom was given to the people who did not belong to the Tribe of Israel". ወእምድንጊዝ ተሐደሰት መንግሥት ገበ ክልዕ ሕዝብ እለ ኢትዮጵያን ደገረ ለሰራዊል ።¹⁰ The Zagwé emperors in attempting to refute this allegation circulated two legends, the one based on a Biblical passage and the other on the life of Queen of Sheba.¹¹ The former emphasizes that the dynasty was descended from Moses as in Numbers 12: 1 reference is made to his having married an Ethiopian woman.¹² Visitors to Ethiopia were made aware of the Zagwé heritage which explains why Abu Salih writes of Lalibela as being "of the family of Moses and Aaron, on account of the coming of Moses into Abyssinia. Moses married the king's daughter."¹³

To justify their legitimacy as a dynasty with Solomonic origins as well, they recounted another legend. When the Queen of Sheba went to Jerusalem she was accompanied by many maids, one of whom Solomon knew before the Queen on the same night. On their return, both the Queen and the maid gave birth to boys on the same day on Ethiopian territory. The Queen's son was called Menelik while the child of the maid was later named Zage ሣገ.¹⁴

Their motive in circulating the two legends was for the following reasons: it emphasized first their origins in Israel and secondly their precedence over the Solomonic dynasty.

10. J. Perruchon, "Note pour l'histoire d'Éthiopie, lettre adressée par le roi d'Éthiopie au roi Georges de Nubie": *Revue Sémitique*, 1 (1893), p. 367.

11. *Kibra Negest* does not seem to have existed at that time.

12. Details of this marriage are given in the history compiled by George, son of Amid, known in Ethiopia as Giorgis Welde Amid. The following is a summary of the details: While Moses was in Egypt war broke out between Ethiopians and Egyptians. The former were the aggressors and one of their strategies was to divert the course of the Nile by building a dam on the Tekezze River. The Pharaoh called a meeting of his dignitaries and asked for their advice. They suggested that Moses lead an expeditionary force against the Ethiopians. Undoubtedly, they were motivated by hatred for the power and honour which he enjoyed at the Egyptian court. Moses accepted the call of the Pharaoh. With a force of 200,000 men, he defeated the Ethiopians and destroyed the dam on the River Tekezze. He married the daughter of the Ethiopian king. After he had concluded a peace treaty with the king and made him swear not to divert the Nile again, he returned to Egypt. It was after this that he killed an Egyptian and fled to Mediam. (MS. in the National Library of Addis Ababa No. 45, pp. 50-51).

13. Abu Salih, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and some Neighbouring Countries*, ed and trans. B. Evetts, (Oxford, 1895), p. 288.

14. Berhane Meskal Desta, *Zena Lal Yibela*, pp. 17-18; Aleqa Taye, *A History of the Ethiopian People*, pp. 28-29 provides a different version.

Despite their efforts, the Zagwé dynasty was unable to gain recognition as the legitimate ruling power. The Church's strong objections did find support among the people but they did not prevent the canonization of some of the Zagwé emperors as saints. However, such action by the Church represented a recognition of individual merit and piety rather than an acceptance of the dynasty.

Although the founder of the Zagwé dynasty, Mera Tekle Haimanot was successful in gaining power he was apparently unable to restore order throughout the Empire as he faced opposition both from the church and from the ardent supporters of the previous Aksumite dynasty.

According to the list of Ethiopian Emperors, he ruled for thirteen years but any achievements of his reign are not revealed in any available source. Some of the chronicles mention that he had four sons by Mesobe Werq: Jan Seyoum, Tetewudem, Girma Seyoum and Yimrehane Kristos. The same chronicles state that each reigned for forty years – an impossible situation unless they are referring to his grandsons as well.¹⁵ His death appears to have been an unpleasant one. In *Gedle Yared* it is stated that he died when his stomach miraculously burst open,¹⁶ apparently a victim of an assassination attempt.

Information from Coptic sources is also sketchy. The successor of Philotheus was Zacharias (1004–1032 A.D.) who used to send letters twice yearly to both Nubia and Ethiopia. The Caliph also was on friendly terms with the Ethiopian Emperor and they frequently exchanged messages. Within Ethiopia the struggle for power does not seem to have lasted long and thus relations with the outside world were maintained. Despite instructions from the Caliph that he must reply to the Ethiopian Emperor's letters in a congenial and respectful tone,¹⁷ Relations between the Caliph and the Patriarch of Alexandria on religious matters within Egypt were unfriendly. The Caliph desired a uniformity of religion within his dominion and intensified persecution against those Christians who refused to be converted to Islam. Even the Patriarch himself was held in prison for many years. Eventually he was released as a result of a petition by the Christian community and the persecutions ceased for a while.

The Caliph "... (al-Hâkim) wrote a decree (sigill) that whosoever of the Christians (Nasârâ) in Misr wished to go to the lands of the Greeks (ar-Rûm) or to the lands of Abyssinia (al-Habasah) and Nubia (an-Nûbah) or to other (lands) should not be prevented (from doing so) by anyone. Before this, they were prevented from (doing) it."¹⁸ They were also permitted to take with them their belongings when they departed.¹⁹ It is said that many Coptic Christians took advantage of the decree to migrate to Ethiopia where as artisans, scholars and merchants among others, they contributed to the cultural and economic life of the country.

2. The Stand of the Patriarchate

From the time of Philotheus onwards, the Metropolitan in Ethiopia was named Daniel. It is not known how long he was active but it would seem that he was still alive during the time of Patriarch Sanuthius II (1032–1047).

15. *Chronicle of Ethiopia*, a manuscript in the possession of Dejazmach Kassa Meshesha, p. 73.

16. *Gedle Yared*, p. 23 (text).

17. Abu Salih, *op.cit.*, p. 290.

18. Sawirus ibn al-Mukaffa, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*, (Cairo, 1948), Vol. II, Pt. II, p. 196.

19. G. Wiet, *L'Égypte arab de la conquête arabe à la conquête ottomane 642-1517 de l'ère chrétienne: Histoire de la Nation Égyptienne*, Vol. IV, (Paris, 1926), p. 209.

Patriarch Sanuthius is known as a reformer of the Church and the effects of his activities were felt in Ethiopia. His particular concern was polygamy which Ethiopia Christians now practised as a result of contact with the Muslim world:

"This continued until the patriarchate of Anbâ Sinuthius, the sixty-seventh patriarch; who commanded the metropolitan to bring them back from this mode of life to the mode of life existing among the Christians of Egypt and Syria, and not to authorize the king and his subjects to do as they were then doing; and after this the Abyssinians refrained from following their former custom, and began to have each of them one wife only.

[This Patriarch] also established that in the rite of consecration of churches the same customs should be followed as in all the churches of Egypt; and he bade the metropolitan direct the Abyssinians to slay at the completion of the building of the church twelve beasts, namely four oxen, four sheep, and four goats, three on each side of the church; and that they should distribute (the flesh) of a (of them) on the day when they ceased from the building of the church, as a gift to God who had helped them to complete a house in which offerings should be made to him and in which his name should be commemorated, and supplication and prayers and praises should be offered."²⁰

Both reforms – the return to monogamy and the ceremony for church dedication – were accepted in Ethiopia. The prime mover in effecting these reforms was Sawirus, consecrated by the Patriarch of Alexandria, Cyril (1078–1092). In a letter to his Patriarch Sawirus reveals that he had succeeded in gradually abolishing polygamy,²¹ an assertion substantiated by the fact that the Zagwé dynasty produced so many saint kings. In the Ethiopian Church one of the pre-requisites²² for canonization as a saint is monogamy if not celibacy. Only if a man adhered to this canon could he secure a place in the circle of saints. With regard to the other reform, the ceremony of church dedication is, to some extent, still practised today.

Prior to these reforms the Metropolitan Daniel had died and Ethiopia remained for a long period without a bishop. The reason cannot be attributed to political interference on the part of the rulers in Egypt, indeed what has been said above underlines their goodwill, but rather to the conflict between the Patriarch and the new dynasty. In spite of the persistence of Zagwé rule, agreement was reached only after the intervention of the Caliph to secure a bishop. No doubt such delay in the arrival of a new Metropolitan had created a situation where a number of anomalies were possible. One of these was the arrival of a pseudo-bishop named Abdoun (or Cyril). A Coptic Christian, he seized the opportunity and, armed with a forged letter, he presented himself as Metropolitan of Ethiopia. In the meantime, an Egyptian Muslim Ali al-Kifti accused the Patriarch Christodoulos (1047–1087) before the Amir al-Guyûs of the following:

"A metropolitan (mutrân) whose name (was) Victor (Buktur) who had been (appointed) by Christodoulos (Akhristûdulûs), the patriarch, had demolished a mosque in the lands of Nubia (an-Nûbah), and that in the lands of Abyssinia (al-Habasah) (there is) a metropolitan (mutrân) whose name (is) Cyril (Kûrîl) and he has respect

20. Abu Salih, *op.cit.*, pp. 290–291.

21. Sawirus ibn al-Mukaffa, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, Pt. III, p. 330.

22. In a later case, that of Tewodros I (1411–1414), the Synaxarist emphasises this point. (W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints*, Vol. IV, p. 1045.) Here it is underlined that one of the major factors which contributed to his canonization was his adherence to monogamy.

for the Muslims (al-Muslimin) and loves them and honours them."²³

This was a sufficient reason for the Amir to imprison the Patriarch but he was released after the alleged destruction in Nubia was disproved. On the second charge, the Patriarch replied "Cyril (Kûrîl) who is called 'Abdûn (is) a pretender to the priesthood, and he has taken by force the archiepiscopate (matranah), because I have not consecrated him, nor have I prayed over him, nor have I made him what he claims for himself, nor have I written to him a letter at all."²⁴

The Patriarch, wishing to settle the matter, sent a bishop Mecurius of Wisim to Ethiopia with the Patriarchal vestments and the monastic stole. His task was to ordain 'Abdun as bishop. The Amir gave orders that the bishop leave immediately accompanied by his special delegate, Kanz ad-Dawalâh whose expenses were to be met by the Patriarch. They journeyed by the land route through Nubia but because of the defection of Kanz ad-Dawalâh, bishop Mecurius had to return to Egypt before reaching Ethiopia.²⁵

The decision of the Patriarch to send Mecurius in the first place has certain canonical implications. According to canon law, Cyril had not met the requirements as a candidate for the position of a bishop.²⁶ Furthermore, the consecration of a bishop requires the participation of a minimum of two bishops,²⁷ one bishop has not the right. Sawirus al-Mukaffa does not clarify under what circumstances the Patriarch was forced to transgress canon law. However the Ethiopian version provides some explanation.

"And in the days of this father [Christodoulus] a certain man whose name was CYRIL went to the country of Ethiopia, and made pretence to be a bishop. And he sent much money to the King of Egypt²⁸, saying, 'Command thou the Archbishop, Abbâ GABRA KRESTOS, to send a messenger to appoint me bishop whilst I am in my country Ethiopia, and each year I will send thee much gold as a present.' And the King of Egypt summoned Abbâ GABRA KRESTOS to him, and he said unto him, 'Send a man on thy behalf to the country of Ethiopia to appoint CYRIL bishop.' And the archbishop answered and said unto him, 'This is undesirable, unless he cometh here.' And the king said unto him, 'Do as I have commanded thee,' and the archbishop said unto him, 'Thy will shall be done.' And the archbishop went forth from the king sorrowfully, and he grieved exceedingly about the matter, and he gathered together all the bishops and told them what the king had said unto him; and when they heard it they were exceedingly sorry. And the archbishop prayed and entreated God to deliver him from brotherhood with CYRIL the Liar. And CYRIL took much money and fled from the country of Ethiopia and came to the country of DAHLUKA, and the King of DAHLUKA seized him and took away all [his money], and bound him in fetters and sent him to the King of Egypt, who shut him up in prison for seven months and after this period cut off his head with the sword. Thus CYRIL died an evil death, and God

23. Sawirus ibn al-Mukaffa, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, Pt. III, p. 316.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 317.

25. *Ibid.*

26. There are eight requirements which a bishop should meet before his election. The first four are concerned with his personal behaviour while the others relate to the procedure of his election. (Abba Paulos Tzadua, *The Fetha Nagast*, (Addis Ababa, 1968), pp 24-26).

27. "... and two or three bishops shall consecrate him". *Ibid.*, p. 25.

28. Another text identifies the Caliph as ጊዮርጊስ al-Mustansir, the eighth Fatimid Caliph (1035-1094). (C. Conti Rossini, "I manoscritti etiopici della missione Cattolica di Cheren": *RRAL*, ser. 5, Vol. XIII, (1904), pp. 266-267).

accepted the prayer of this father."²⁹

Abdun continued his work in Ethiopia undisturbed and the problem remained unsettled until the time of Cyril (1072-1092) who sought a remedy for the situation. He was also under considerable pressure from the Ethiopian delegates present in Egypt. "On account of the many messengers arriving from the lands of Abyssinia (al-Habasa) and Nubia (an-Nûbah)."³⁰ About 1080, a certain Severus (Sawirus) a nephew of Victor the bishop of Nubia, and educated by him, approached the Amir al-Guyus with an offer of a huge sum of money and the promise to expand Islam if he could become the Metropolitan of Ethiopia. The Amir found his proposals attractive and insisted on his consecration as bishop. There was little the Patriarch could do, so in spite of his opposition: "The Father Abba Cyril (Anbâ Kîrillus) consecrated a metropolitan (matrân) from Abyssinia (al-Habasa). He was a learned young man whose name (was) Severus (Sawirus), the son of the sister of Victor (Buktur), the deceased metropolitan (matrân). He had been brought up there with his aforesaid uncle. He (Severus) made many promises to Amir al-Guyus so that he approached Abba Cyril (Anbâ Kîrillus) (and asked him) to advance him, and he (Cyril) consecrated him. He (Severus) said that he would continue (to supply) him (Amir al-Guyus) with presents from there, and would allow the kings to obey him. When he (Severus) had journeyed and had arrived in the lands of Abyssinia (al-Habasa), Cyril (Kûrîl) whom we have mentioned before, opposed him....

"Then this Cyril (Kûrîl) collected his wealth and journeyed to Dahlak, and there was with him much money. The chief of Dahlak arrested him, and he took his money and he despatched him to Amir al-Guyus. When he reached Cairo (al-Kâhirah), he (Amir al-Guyus) caused him to be brought to his Council. There he enquired concerning him, and he was informed of the correctness of what had been said about him, and he imprisoned him in the Treasury of Flags (Khazâna al-Bunûd) for a time. Then he beheaded him in the year eight hundred and sixty of the Martyrs. [1143-1144 A.D.]

"Then letters arrived from Severus (Sawirus), the metropolitan (matrân), (in which he informed him (the patriarch) that the lands of Abyssinia (al-Habasa) were in order, and what there was in them in the way of corruption had been suppressed and that the king, and his wazirs, and the inhabitants of his kingdom, and his friends, and all his subjects had each one of them many wives, and that he (Severus) did not cease (to speak) with the king to make him desist from this, humouring him and exhorting him until he removed from him all his wives, and (that) there remained with him only one wife in addition to the mother of his children. He tried (to make him) give up the wife, and to remain only with the mother of his children, but he was not able (to do this), and he (the king) said to him: 'I have given up all my wives, but as regards this (one), I am not able to give her up, and I cannot separate from her on account of my great love for her.' He (Severus) dispensed him (the king) with regard to this, and he pretended to overlook it, for fear lest the affair might turn against him. He (Severus) did in like manner with the inhabitants of his (the King's) kingdom, and the principal men of his State, and the rest of his subjects; and all of them gave up what they used to practise in the way of taking many wives. He asked in his letter that the patriarch should write a letter to the king and to the inhabitants of his kingdom and wazirs and the men

29. W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, (London, 1928), Vol. II, p. 379.

30. Sawirus ibn al-Mukaffa, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, Pt. III, p. 327.

of his State, exhorting them in it, and instructing them that this was the correct (thing), and forbidding them to observe the customs of the Old (Testament), and mentioning to them the spiritual instructions from the holy books of the Old and New (Testaments), and explaining in it what might support the correctness of of his (Severus') words to them, and strengthen his injunction concerning them, that they might profit thereby in this world and in the next. He (the patriarch) answered his (Severus') request, and he wrote a letter as was requisite, even more precisely than what he (Severus) wished, and he sent it to him with the messengers who had reached him with his (Severus') letters."³¹

A later account, however, appears to contradict this image of missionary zeal, "It was in (the) Tax-Year (al-Khirāḡiāh) four hundred and seventy-eight³² (that) the brother of the Metropolitan (mutrān) (sic) of Abyssinia (al-Habasah) arrived with a gift (which) did not make a good impression upon Amīr al-Guyūs and did not please him. It was Friday, the twenty-second of it (the month of Bābah), and he (Amīr al-Guyūs) summoned Abba Cyril (Abā Kirillūs) the patriarch, and he came, and (there were) with him ten bishops and Abū Malīh Menas (Mīnā) ibn Zacharias (Zakariyā), the master of the Dīwān of the Gates (al-Abwāb) in Cairo (Misr). His surname was as-Saikh al-Athīr Nagīb ad-Dawlah wa-Makīniha.

When they entered in unto the illustrious Amīr al-Guyūs, they found the brother of the Metropolitan (mutrān) of Abyssinia (al-Habasah), standing there. When they were seated, Amīr al-Guyūs said to them: 'Ye made the brother of this (man) Metropolitan (mutrān) of Abyssinia (al-Habasah), and we have money due to us from him, and instead of building mosques in the lands of Abyssinia (al-Habasah) and bearing gifts and settling many things, he has not done (anything), and he sent (only) something similar to it....

The aforesaid Abraham (Afrahām) said to the illustrious Amīr al-Guyūs: 'O my lord, this Metropolitan (mutrān) was not appointed except at thy command.' He said to him: 'Thou and this Saikh, namely, the patriarch, are lying,' and the multitude kept silent. Then Amīr al-Guyūs said: 'It is requisite that two bishops should journey (to Abyssinia), so that the mosques in the lands of Abyssinia (al-Habasah) may be built, and (that) the claim may be established, and (that) the gift may be brought, and the gift shall be settled according to this for fifty years, and they shall not settle (it), therefore, according to their choice. They have begun in those lands to waylay the Muslim (al-Muslimīn) merchants and others than them. Let the patriarch forbid them (to do) this, otherwise, I know what I shall do.' The father, the patriarch, said: 'O my lord, what have I to do with waylaying? Am I a watchman (khafir)?' He (Amīr al-Guyūs) commanded that he (the patriarch) and the bishops should be put forth, and they were put forth from the Council in a most disgraceful manner; and he commanded that the brother of Metropolitan (mutrān) should be imprisoned, and they put him under arrest in the Treasury of Flags (Khazānah al-Bunūd), and he (Amīr al-Guyūs) commanded that the names of the bishops who were present should be written down. When their names had been written down, there went out to them two chamberlains who were put in charge of them at two dinārs a day, until they should write to the king of Abyssinia (al-Habasah), and should decide to send two bishops from among them. They went down, and the guardians with them, to the Church of the Mistress

31. *Ibid.* Vol. II, pt. III, pp. 329-330.

32. Equivalent to 1088 AD.

al-Mu'allakah in Cairo (Misr). The father, the patriarch, used to give to them (the bishops) every day the agreed wage that they might pay it to the guardians, and he did not let them suffer the loss of anything. They wrote the letters, and they decided on sending Mark; (Markus), bishop of Wasim and al-Gizah and Theodore (Tādrus) bishop of Singar....

"It happened that, at that time, a Muslim merchant presented a letter to him (Amīr al-Guyūs), complaining in it that he (the brother of the Metropolitan) had waylaid him in the lands of Abyssinia (al-Habasah), and had taken his money. He (Amīr al-Guyūs) caused him to be brought into their presence, and he inquired of him concerning the affair of his case. God the Exalted caused him to speak (and) to say: 'He (the brother of the Metropolitan) took my money in the lands of Abyssinia (al-Habasah), and the king arrested Severus (Sawirus) before he gave me my rights.' Amīr al-Guyūs said to him: 'If the Metropolitan (mutrān) was arrested, how was he able to give to thee thy rights? Nevertheless, the king is (?) supreme lord in his lands.' Then he turned to Rigāl, the brother of the Metropolitan (mutrān) and he said to him: 'Thy brother accepted our conditions that he should build in the lands of Abyssinia (al-Habasah) four mosques, and he has not done (so).' Rigāl said to him: 'O my lord, he built seven mosques in the places, where it was possible to build (them), and their case is well known, namely, (how) the Abyssinians (al-Habasah) demolished them and wished to kill him (the Metropolitan), and that, when the news of this reached the king, he arrested the Metropolitan (mutrān) and imprisoned him.' The illustrious Amīr al-Guyūs said 'Blessed!.' Then he said to the patriarch and to the bishops: 'What have ye done?' They said: 'We have written the letters in Coptic (Kibṭī) and Arabic ('Arabī). Command him whom thou desirest, to read them and to interpret them before thee.' He said: 'I consider that ye (are) trustworthy, and I esteem you, and I trust you more than all the Christians (an-Nasārā). Who of you will journey with these letters together with my letter and my messenger?' They said: 'These two bishops,' and they pointed to both of them. He looked at both of them and he said: 'Blessed', and he commanded the two chamberlains who were in charge of the bishops to retire from them and not to hinder them, and he reassured them, and he honoured them, and they went forth from his presence happy, giving thanks to God the Exalted"³³ Sawirus ibn al-Mukaffa does not reveal the contents of the Patriarch's letter to the Emperor of Ethiopia although he had access to it; on the contrary, he gives the summary of the letter from the Amīr al-Guyūs:

"A certain good, trustworthy (person) related to me that the illustrious Amīr al-Guyūs said in his letter to the king of Abyssinia (al-Habasah): 'If thou dost not do thus and thus, I shall demolish the churches which (are) in the land of Egypt (Misr).' He (the king) wrote to him a reply, saying: 'If thou demolish a single stone of the churches, I shall carry to thee all the bricks and the stones of Mecca (Makkah), and I shall deliver all of them to thee, and if a single brick of it (Mecca) is missing, I shall send to thee its weight in gold'.³⁴

There is evidence that a large Muslim community existed in Ethiopia at that time. In Quiha, northern Ethiopia, a Muslim cemetery has been found. Some of the Arabic

33. Sawirus ibn al-Mukaffa, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, Pt. III, pp. 347-351.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 351.

funeral inscriptions date back to the eleventh century.³⁶ Relations between Christian and Muslim in Ethiopia were harmonious. The example of religious tolerance set by the Ethiopian and Nubian monarchs towards their Muslim citizens was cited by the Copts: "Thy authority has not the right to force anyone to forsake his religion, as we have two kings, namely, the king of Abyssinia (Habasah) (sic) and the king of Nubia (Nūbah), and they do not force anyone of the people of your religion who is dwelling among them to change his faith."³⁷ The Muslims in Ethiopia were both those Ethiopians who had been converted to Islam and those who had settled in Ethiopia for commercial reasons.

3. Trade and Politics

Trade was active particularly between Ethiopia and Egypt as the routes were safe and the caravans travelled without interference.

Both land and sea routes were cleared of robbers and pirates and the only obstacle to normal trade activities was the case of Severus. Towards the end of the eleventh century, however, during the Patriarchate of Michael IV (1092-1102), relations were restored. At that time the waters of the Nile had decreased during the month of July and had not risen again. It was believed that the Emperor had diverted the Nile in order to put pressure on the Muslim authorities. As Herodotus observed, the Nile is the life of Egypt without which survival is not possible. Therefore, Sultan al-Mustansir entreated the Emperor to release the water as the Egyptian economy was suffering. Through the mediation of Michael, the king "ordered a large enclosed valley to be opened by the cutting a dam. As soon as this was done the Nile rose ten feet in a single night and the whole land of Egypt was irrigated."³⁸ The fact is that there was a drought in Ethiopia which accounts for the falling of the Nile waters.

The coming of Michael to Ethiopia was a blessing because while he was celebrating Mass, a heavy rain began to fall. It was believed to be the result of his prayers. Thus he was acclaimed in Ethiopia as a saint and in Egypt as a successful diplomat. It is interesting to note that this is the first recorded visit of an Alexandrian Patriarch to Ethiopia.

Following the visit of the Patriarch, commercial activities returned to normal.



Arabic inscription from Meqellé (Tigré)

Photo: Serg

36. C. Pansera, "Quattro stele musulmane presso Uogher Haribà nell' Enderta": *Studi Etiopici*, (Rome, 1945), pp. 3-6. A large number of funeral inscriptions from this site are to be found in the Institute of Ethiopian Archaeology. Some have been published by M. Schneider, "Stèles funéraires arabes de Quiha": *AE* 7 (1967), pp. 107-118. The Portuguese mission to Prester John passed through this area in the first quarter of the sixteenth century on its way to see the monarch. They observed that the inhabitants were Muslim: "In this country there are villagers of Moors, separated from the Christians; they say that they pay much tribute to the lords of the country in gold and silk stuffs. They do not serve in the general services like the Christians; they have not got mosques, because they are not allowed to build or possess them." F. Alvares, *The Prester John of the Indies*, trans. C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford, (Hakluyt Society, Cambridge, 1961), Vol. I, p. 174.

37. Sawirus ibn al-Mukaffia, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, Pt. II, p. 218.

38. de L. O'Leary, *The Ethiopian Church*, (London, 1936) pp. 48-49; C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, p. 289; Al-Maqrizi, *A Short History of the Copts, and their Church*, trans. S. C. Malan, (London, 1873), pp. 92-93. The Ethiopic version found in the chronicle of *Giorgis Welde Amid* places this event during the time of Cyril II, predecessor of Michael IV. The author states that there was a widespread famine in Egypt and that the Sultan, al-Mustansir, ordered the Patriarch to send someone to Ethiopia to persuade the King of Ethiopia to release the waters of the Nile. The King agreed and worked for three consecutive years to cut the dam. It is suggested that the motive was to gain an easy victory without bloodshed. The then Egyptian bishop in Ethiopia reacted strongly to the King's plan but without success. In despair, the bishop departed and isolated himself in a remote place. (MS. National Library, Addis Ababa, pp. 518-519; cf. Al-Omari, Masalik, el Absar fi Mamalik el Amsar, *L'Afrique, moins l'Égypte*, trans. Gaude froy-Demombynes, (Paris, 1927), p. 30 n. 1).

A Geniza³⁹ document provides some details about the nature of this trade. A certain Jewish merchant from the family of Lebdi (Leptis Magna in Tripolitania, modern Libya) undertook a journey from Cairo to India in the years 1097-1098. The merchandise that he carried included textiles of different kinds, Russian linen, silver vessels, copper vessels of various types of drugs, corals and a bag containing twenty newly-minted gold dinars. His itinerary took him from Cairo (Fustat) to Akhmim in Upper Egypt, Kus and Aidi. It was the main port for trade with India. From there he sailed directly to Dahlak (Massawa), apparently without touching Suvaqim and Badi, because Dahlak "was the main southern port of the western border of the Red Sea."⁴² Here textiles were in great demand and as he was offered very high prices he sold not only those articles destined for Dahlak but also those ordered by people in Aden. He was also able to dispose of some of his drugs before proceeding on to India via Aden. On his return from India he sailed to Dahlak instead to Aden and from there he wrote a letter to the Aden Trustee indicating that he was prepared to travel from Dahlak to Aden to settle accounts and to collect further merchandise.⁴³ The goods carried by this merchant illustrate the type of trade from Egypt. In the other direction, among other commodities Ethiopia exported slaves in such great numbers that during this century there is reference to a separate contingent in the Egyptian army consisting of 30,000 Ethiopians and so people from Zenj.⁴⁴

Trade also continued with Yemen where most of the wealth depended on trade paid by merchants from India, Egypt and Ethiopia. Aden was the main port and a certain type of trade conducted on a large scale with both East and West. Al-Burhan observed that "At Aden no week passes but ships come to it from Higez, Sind, Hind, China or Ethiopia."

4. The Zagwé Emperors after Mera Tekle Haimanot

Traditional Ethiopian sources provide us with little information about the immediate successors of Mera Tekle Haimanot and such information as is available does not necessarily correspond with the order given in the lists. According to *Gedle Yimreh Kristos*, Mera Tekle Haimanot had three sons, the eldest Tetewudem, followed by Giu Seyoum and Jan Seyoum.⁴⁶ There is no mention of whether the latter two came to the throne but the same source states that Yimrehane Kristos, the son of Giu Seyoum, succeeded Tetewudem.⁴⁷

From the description of Tetewudem in *Gedle Yimrehane Kristos*⁴⁸ it would appear that he was not a rigid Christian. His interest in magic, for instance, led him on one occasion to assemble the magicians and question them on the future of his empire and whether

39. "Geniza" is a chamber adjacent to a synagogue (or found in a cemetery), in which papers and books covered with Hebrew letters may be put aside for storage." S.D. Goitein, "From the Mediterranean to India, Documents on the Trade to India, South Arabia, and East Africa from the Eleventh to Twelfth Centuries", *Speculum*, 29 (1954), p. 182.

40. S.D. Goitein, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

41. It is interesting to note that the Muslim coins found in Debre Danno are newly-minted. "They were such an excellent condition that they had circulated probably very little" (D. Matthews and A. Motz, "The Monastery of Debra Danno, Ethiopia", *Archaeologia* 97 (1959), p. 51).

42. S.D. Goitein, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194.

44. E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, (London, 1906), Vol. II, p. 223.

45. C. Caton and R. B. Sergeant, "A Fiscal Survey of the Medieval Yemen", *Arabica* 4 (1957), p. 27.

46. In Beke Gebriel there is a MS., *Gedle Lalibela*, in which is listed some Zagwé personalities who were canonized saints by the Church of Ethiopia. Among them is Jan Seyoum who is commemorated on the *Ginbor* (20th May).

47. MS. Beke Medhane Alem.

48. A short description of it is found in F. Alvares, *The Prestier John of the Indies*, Vol. I, pp. 204

his son would succeed him. To his surprise he was informed that Yimrehane Kristos, the son of his brother, would be his successor. To escape persecution and probable death, Yimrehane Kristos fled to Begemidir where he remained, hiding himself in caves and in the mountains. When he heard of the death of his uncle, Tetewudem, he returned to Lasta. There he received a joyous welcome by the people many of whom accompanied him to Adefa, the capital city.

After his coronation he adopted quite different policies from his uncle with regard to the internal affairs of his empire. He prohibited the pagan practice of magic through a decree in which all inhabitants were forbidden to take part in any form of witchcraft. His order seemed to have some effect. In addition, his prescription for the Christian life was to abide by monogamy, an example which he himself set no doubt as a result of Sawirus' teachings.

In his undertakings he revealed himself as a man of simplicity and uprightness. He did not take advantage of his position but rather, vigorously supported the cause of truth and justice. When he planned to build a church on the site called Wegre Sihin, now known simply as Yimrehane Kristos, he compensated the owner before expropriating the land. In his private life also he displayed that simplicity and modesty which befitted a priest and in his capacity as a priest he regularly fulfilled his duties, celebrating Holy Communion and hearing confession. Such was the faith of the people in him that after his death they went to his grave to repent their sins.

Relations with Egypt were also harmonious and he was on friendly terms with the Sultan. According to his life story (*the Gedle*) he sent men to Egypt to find materials such as marble and special woods to be used in church construction. It is further mentioned that approximately 6,000 Egyptians came to Ethiopia. His request for a new bishop was well received by the Sultan and he gave orders to the Patriarch to hasten the ordination.

"In this year,⁴⁹ a messenger from the king of Abyssinia (al-Habasah) reached the lord, the illustrious al-Afdal, requesting that a metropolitan (mutrân) should be appointed for them and for his lands, and that he should send him to him with his messenger. He (al-Afdal) caused Abba Michael (Anbâ Mikhâyil), the patriarch, to be brought and he proposed to him that he should appoint a metropolitan (mutrân) for Abyssinia (al-Habasah), and should hasten to send him with the messenger. The patriarch came forth from his presence, and he sought for him who should be fit for this affair, (but) he did not find (anyone). When he was constrained in this (matter), he sent to the Monastery of Abba Macarius (Abû Makâr), and he took a monk whose name (was) George (Girgis), and he consecrated him metropolitan (mutrân) of Abyssinia (al-Habasah), and he sent him to them. He (George) stayed with them for a short time, (but) he did not succeed, nor did he know how to manage his affair(s) with them. It is said concerning him that he transgressed there in infamous affairs and in vile deeds (which) did not become his rank. The king seized him and took all that he had acquired for himself there, and he sent him back to Egypt (Misr), and he wrote to the lord, the illustrious al-Afdal, complaining of what he had done in those lands. He (al-Afdal) commanded him to be seized and to be put under arrest in the Prison of the Guard in Cairo (Misr). He remained in it under arrest for a number of years with Farag the monk, who, in the days of Amîr al-Guyûs, used to importune the bishops and the monks."⁵⁰ Al-Mukaffa does not discuss the matter further and does not reveal whether

another Metropolitan was appointed but since the Sultan treated the case sympathetically it can be assumed that another Metropolitan returned with the envoy of the Ethiopian Emperor. This assumption is confirmed in *Gedle Yimrehane Kristos* where there is a reference to the arrival of a Metropolitan, Athanasius, in Ethiopia.⁵¹ This same source also mentions a visit by the Patriarch Cyril.⁵² Although the purpose of this visit is not discussed, the importance of the presence of the Patriarch is underlined by the fact that it was regarded as a visit from God Himself. On the other hand, in the chronicle of George son of Amid no personal visit by the Patriarch is mentioned, the only reference is to the despatch of the envoys to Ethiopia.⁵³

Yimrehane Kristos was canonized by the Church as a saint. He was the first Zagwé Emperor recognized as a saint in the Church calendar⁵⁴ and is commemorated on the 19th of Tiqimt (29th October). As he had no son to succeed him, on his death Harbé or Gebre Mariam came to the throne.

5. The Reforms of Harbé

Harbé was the son of Jan Seyoum and the brother of Lalibela. The major area of reform during his reign was connected with the election of a Metropolitan. The succession of bishops appointed from Alexandria presented certain difficulties not the least of which was the fact that an Egyptian Metropolitan normally did not speak the language of the country and had therefore to communicate through interpreters on both private and official occasions. He was also unaware of the conditions prevailing in the country prior to his arrival. Moreover inefficient church administration had contributed to a decline in the moral and educational standards of the clergy. For these reasons perhaps Harbé considered it necessary to introduce some reforms in order to revive the spiritual life of his country. He asked Metropolitan Michael to consecrate seven Ethiopian bishops from among the clergy with the idea of creating a nucleus of bishops and ultimately achieving emancipation from the Patriarchate of Alexandria. Michael refused on the grounds that he had received no such instructions from the Patriarch and advised Harbé to send a delegation to the Patriarch to seek his approval first. When the Patriarch took a firm stand against the proposal, the delegation turned to the Sultan and persuaded him to apply pressure. As he was in favour of the idea, the Sultan ordered the Patriarch to agree to the Ethiopian Emperor's request but again the Patriarch refused and instead asked for an audience with the Sultan. In a private conversation he made it clear that what in fact the Emperor was asking for was independence. The consequences of such a change were apparent to both men: they would lose their influence over Ethiopia as well as the tribute paid by the Emperor on request for a new Metropolitan. The Sultan, now in agreement with the Patriarch, called the Ethiopian delegation and asked them to leave the country

51. MS. Bete Medhane Alem, *Gedle Yimrehane Kristos*. During the time of the Patriarch Gebriel (1131-1145) we find his successor, a Metropolitan named Michael. (W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints*, Vol. III, p. 800).

52. The version of Alvares, as he had been told by local priests, runs: "They say that the larger of these two [tombs] belongs to a Patriarch of Alexandria, who came [from Jerusalem] to see this King, having heard of his sanctity, and he died [and was buried] here." (*The Prester John*, Vol. I, p. 204).

53. MS. in the National Library, p. 52.

54. It is interesting to note that although the Zagwé kings were not recognized as legitimate emperors of Ethiopia they were accepted as saints. The explanation is that while the former depended on hereditary succession the latter was a matter of personal effort. One should however note here that this is according to his life story *Gedle*. In *the Book of the Saints*, Vol. I, p. 170, his name is mentioned in connection with the persecution of the Christians of Al-Matrâ, who according to a Bodelean MS. "were slain by King Yemràha."

49. Equivalent to 1101 A.D.

50. Sawirus ibn al-Mukaffa, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, Pt. III, pp. 394-395.

immediately. He entrusted them with a letter stating that Harbé must be satisfied with a Metropolitan sent from Egypt when the occasion demanded. Thus Harbé's attempts at reform were unsuccessful.

In this connection the account of this event as it is found in the *History of the Patriarchs* is as follows:

"And God performed at the hands of this patriarch wonders and miracles and good works, and I shall record some of them. And it is what took place in the lands of Ethiopia (al-Habasat), and this (was) that the king of Ethiopia (al-Habasat) summoned Abba (Abbâ) Michael (Mikhâyil) — and his name before his consecration (as) Metropolitan (mutrân) of Ethiopia (al-Habasat) (was) Habib — and he sought from him that he should consecrate for him bishops in excess of the usual number according to the recognized custom established from ancient times,⁵⁵ but he refused this. And he said: 'I have not the power to do anything, except on the advice of the patriarch.' And the king despatched to the patriarch a letter asking him about this, and another letter to the king of Egypt (Misr) which his messenger accompanied. And an order of the califate (Khalifat) went out to the patriarch to comply with what he asked. And he excused himself and said to the califate (al-Khalifat) 'O Sire, if the bishops for Ethiopia (al-Habasat) become more than this number, they will dare to consecrate an Archbishop (mutrân), and they will free themselves from the obedience of the Patriarchs of Egypt (Misr), and they will dispense with them, and they will begin to appoint (patriarchs) for themselves, and there will not remain for them any need of the Patriarchs of Egypt (Misr), and they will not owe obedience to them, and this will drive them into enmity and hostility towards whomsoever borders their lands from among the Muslims (al-Muslimîn), and discipline will be relaxed among them. And wars will be multiplied by them, as they were wont to do in ancient times, in the days of Pharaoh and Moses (Mûsâ)⁵⁶ and of those who were before him of the Pharaonic kings, and (as) they were wont to attack them by land and by sea, and reports about this are recorded in the history of the first (peoples). Then the patriarch wrote (to him) a letter warning him and commanding him to desist from what he sought from him, and he despatched the letter to him. And when the messengers of the patriarch returned from Ethiopia (al-Habasat), they reported that fire had descended from heaven upon the castle of the king and it had burned a part of it. Then the lands of Ethiopia (al-Habasat) experienced great dearth in that year, and a great pestilence, and rain did not fall in it, and they endured on account of this great difficulty. Then the king received the letter of the patriarch, and he came back to God, and he wrote to the califate (al-Khalifat) of Egypt (Misr), (and) he asked him to ask the patriarch to absolve him and to write to him a letter of blessing upon him and upon his lands. Then he (the patriarch) wrote to him concerning this, and despatched it (the letter) to him (the king). And at the hour of the arrival of the reply to them, God removed His wrath from them and His mercy reached them, and the rain fell, and their lands were sown, and their prices became cheap, and the dearth and the pestilence were removed from them through the mercy of God and the good pleasure of this father for them."⁵⁷

55. Marginal note of the same author: "(It was) the usual custom to consecrate for Ethiopia (al-Habasat) and Nubia (an-Nubat) seven bishops and not more. For if they complete ten, they would consecrate metropolitans (al-matârinah), and they will have no need for the Patriarch of Egypt (Misr). On account of this the patriarch forbids to consecrate for them".

56. See above, p. 241 n. 12.

57. Sawirus ibn al-Mukaffa, *History of the Patriarchs*, Vol. III, pt. I, pp. 56-57.

The details of this event are given in the Ethiopian Synaxar of 10th Miazia in connection with the life of Abba Gebriel II the 70th Patriarch of Alexandria (1131-1145).

"And in the days of this father the King of Ethiopia commanded Abbâ MICHAEL, saying, 'Set a bishop over the country of Ethiopia'; and the bishop said unto the king, 'I cannot appoint another bishop without the command of the archbishop. And the King of Ethiopia sent a letter to this father Abbâ GABRIEL the archbishop,' asking him concerning this matter, and he also sent a letter to the King of Egypt asking him to command this father [to appoint a bishop]. And this father commanded Abbâ MICHAEL, Bishop of Ethiopia, to appoint for him other bishops over and above those which had been already appointed. And the King of MESR (CAIRO) commanded this father Abbâ GABRIEL to command Abbâ MICHAEL, Bishop of Ethiopia, to do everything that the King of Ethiopia wished. And the nobles came in to the King of MESR (CAIRO), and they said unto him, 'If bishops become many in the country of Ethiopia they will wax bold, and they will appoint bishops as they please, and they will never return to thee at all'. When the King of MESR (CAIRO) heard this, he commanded this father archbishop, Abbâ GABRIEL, saying, 'Send a letter and curse the King of Ethiopia, so that henceforward he may not appoint bishops over the country of Ethiopia'; and the archbishop sent a letter as the King of Egypt commanded him. When that letter reached the King of Ethiopia, suddenly his palace caught fire and famine and plague broke out in his land, and the rain was held back, and would not fall on the fields, and great tribulation came upon the people, for the king refused [to obey]; and he transgressed the command of God. Then the King of Ethiopia turned to God and repented, and he sent a letter to the King of MESR (CAIRO) asking him to command this father to send, and release him from this ban. And this father wrote a letter of blessing, and sent it to the King of Ethiopia, and to all the Ethiopians, and blessed them. When that letter reached the country of Ethiopia God of removed the famine and the plague and the people rejoiced with great joy. And this is what happened in the days of that king."⁵⁸

Harbé's plan met with strong opposition from the Christian community in Ethiopia and as misery increased hostility mounted. Eventually the worsening situation persuaded the followers of the old dynasty to press for restoration but without a bishop success was not possible. Therefore in 1152 they sent their own delegation to Egypt to request another bishop.⁵⁹ The Patriarch John V (1147-1167) was aware that there was a Metropolitan already present in Ethiopia and that, according to canon law, he could not be removed from his See until he died or was excommunicated for heresy. The delegation pointed out that Metropolitan Michael was very old and no longer able to fulfill his duties. This was not sufficient reason to replace him and furthermore, as the Patriarch explained, he had examined Michael and found him fit for the position before he had consecrated him. In view of this uncompromising reply the delegation turned to the Fatimid Wazir al Malik al-Adil. He agreed to support them and pressed the Patriarch to consecrate another bishop. Again the Patriarch refused but as the situation grew more intolerable he was finally forced to capitulate saying; "My weak body is at your disposal but you have no right whatsoever over my religion."⁶⁰ Although the delegation eventually failed in its mission, it represented the first attempt by the old dynasty to regain power.

58. W. Budge, *op.cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 800-801.

59. C. Conti Rossini and other believes that the Zagwé dynasty began in this year, see the argument above, p. 240 n. 6.

60. "Mein schwacher Körper ist in deiner Hand, über meine Religion ist dir keine Macht". R. Strothmann, *Die Koptische Kirche in der Neuzeit*, (Tübingen, 1932), p. 145.

In spite of the considerable opposition, Harbé did not renounce his plan. An Ethiopian community had existed for some time in the Holy Land.⁶¹ It is probable that Harbé instructed the head of that community to request that the Syrian Patriarch ordain a bishop for Ethiopia. Since they shared common doctrinal views he no doubt expected a favourable response but at that time the Syrian community in Jerusalem was experiencing the effects of the invasion and occupation by the Crusaders. They were now under the protection of the Franciscans and consequently had adopted the Catholic dogma. Although there is a later reference to a Syrian bishop in northern Ethiopia it does not seem that Harbé's plan met with success. However, by turning to the Holy Land, he did open up contact with the western world through the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem. It is not known whether these Ethiopians contributed to the development of the legend of Prester John but as they were in Jerusalem at the time when the legend began to circulate, it is probable that they did.

6. The Legend of Prester John

The legend first appeared in the first half of the twelfth century.⁶² In 1122, the envoys of the Pope in Byzantium returned to Rome with an exotic Christian who, through an interpreter, told of wonderful things about his country. He presented himself as the Patriarch of India and stated that he confessed Nestorianism. Although some doubted him, he succeeded in convincing his audience. There are two accounts of this visit: one by an anonymous author, the other written by Odo of Rheims, abbot of St. Remy (1118–1151), to a certain Count Thomas.⁶³ A few years later the legend had undergone some slight change: the person about whom it speaks is no longer a Nestorian Patriarch but a Nestorian Priest-King, Prester John. The originator of this new version was a French-born bishop, Hugh of Jabala. Bishop Otto Freising recorded it in his famous chronicles in the seventh book.

"He [i. e. Hugh] related also that not many years before a certain John, a king and priest who dwells beyond Persia and Armenia in the uttermost East and, with all his people, is a Christian but a Nestorian, made war on the brother kings of Persians and Medes, called Samiardi, and stormed Ekbatana (the seat of their kingdom) of which mention has been made above. When the aforesaid kings met him

61. According to Ethiopian legendary sources the presence of Ethiopians in Jerusalem dates back to the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon. In literary sources their presence is dated from the fourth century A.D. (E. Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina; storia della comunità etiopica di Gerusalemme*, 2 Vols., (Roma, 1943–1947), Vol. I, p. 1 ff.; O. Meinardus, "The Ethiopian in Jerusalem": *Zeitschrift fuer Kirchengeschichte*, vierte Folge XIV, Bd. 76 (1965), p. 113 ff. In the Edict of Umar, Ethiopians and Iberians in Jerusalem were cited as separate communities while the rest - Franks, Copts, Syrians, Armenians, Nestorians, Jacobites and Maramites were pilgrims and all under the Greek Patriarch. (Ch. Papadopoulos, *History of the Church of Jerusalem*, (Jerusalem, 1910), Greek text, p. 259).

62. Among the many works on this subject, few of them are as follows: R. Lefevre, "Riflessi etiopici nella cultura europea del Medioevo e del Rinascimento": *Annali Lateranensi*, Vol. VIII (1944), pp. 9–89; G. Oppert, *Der Presbyter Johannes in Sage und Geschichte*, (Berlin, 1864); L. Olschki, "Der Brief des Presbyters Johannes": *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. CXLIV (1931); J. Richard, "L'Extrême-Orient légendaire au Moyen Age: Roi David et Prêtre Jean": *AE* 2 (1957), pp. 225–242; V. Slessarev, *Prester John, The Letter and the Legend*, (London, 1959); F. Zarncke, "Der Priester Johannes": *Abhandlungen der Philologisch-historischen Classe der Koeniglichen Saechsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 7 (1879), pp. 829–1028 and 8 (1880), pp. 1–186.

63. C.F. Beckingham, *The Achievements of Prester John*, (London, 1966), p. 45; V. Slessarev, *op. cit.*, p. 22 ff.; L. Olschki, *op. cit.*, p. 837 ff. According to the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, Vol. V (1929 edition), pp. 90–91, the source of the legend of Prester John was the writings of Eldad the Danite, a Jewish traveller of the ninth century; "It was the source of the apocryphal letter of the so-called 'Prester John' which appeared in the twelfth century."

with an army composed of Persians, Medes and Assyrians a battle ensued which lasted for three days, since both parties were willing to die rather than turn flight. Prester John, for so they are accustomed to call him, putting the Persians to flight with dreadful carnage finally emerged victorious. He said that after the victory the aforesaid John moved his army to the aid of the Church in Jerusalem but that when he had reached the river Tigris and was unable to transport his army across that river by any device he turned towards the north, where, he had learned this stream was frozen over on account of the winter's cold. When he had tarried there for several years without, however, seeing his heart's desire realized (the continued mild weather prevented it), and lost many of his soldiers because of the unfamiliar climate he was forced to return home. It is said that he is a lineal descendant of the Magi, of whom mention is made in the Gospel,⁶⁴ and that, ruling over the same peoples which they governed, he enjoys such great glory and wealth that he uses no scepter save one of emerald. Inflamed by the example of his father who came to adore Christ in his manger, he had planned to go to Jerusalem but for reason aforesaid he was prevented—so men say. But enough of this."⁶⁵

In 1165 it was assumed that this Prester John sent a letter to "various Christian kings and especially to the Emperor Manuel of Constantinople and the Roman Emperor Frederick"⁶⁶ (1152–1190). The letter follows:

"Prester John, by the Grace of God most powerful king over all Christian king to the Emperor of Rome and the King of France, our friends. We wish you to learn about us, our position, the government of our land, and our people and beasts. And since you say that our Greeks, or men of Grecian race, do not pray to God the way you do in your country, we let you know that we worship and believe Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, three persons in one Deity and one true God only. We attest and inform you by our letter, sealed with our seal, of the condition and character of our land and men. And if you desire something that we can do for you, ask us, for we shall do it gladly. In case you wish to come hither to our country, we shall make you on account of your good reputation our successors and we shall grant you vast lands, manors, and mansions.

Let it be known to you that we have the highest crown on earth as well as gold, silver, precious stones and strong fortresses, cities, towns, castles, and boroughs. We have under our sway forty-two kings who all are mighty and good Christians. And know that we maintain for the glory and love of Jesus Christ all the poor of our country, be they our men or foreigners.

Know also that we have promised and sworn in our good faith to conquer the Sepulcher of our Lord and the whole Promised Land. And if you wish and pleases God, we shall have it; but may you too display the great and steadfast valour which is yours, since we were told of your true and loyal courage. But there are other Frenchmen among you of your lineage and from your retinue who hold with the Saracens. You confide to them and trust them that they should and will help you, but they are the false and treacherous Hospitalers. Know that we have killed them in our country as it should be done with those who turn against the faith.

Our land is divided into four parts, for there are so many Indias. In Greater India

64. Matthew 2: 1–12.

65. V. Slessarev, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–28.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

lies the body of the Apostle Saint Thomas for whom our Lord has wrought more miracles than for the [other] saints who are in heaven. And this India is toward the East, for it is near the deserted Babylon and also near the tower called Babel. In another province toward the North there is a great abundance of bread, wine, meat, and everything necessary for the human body.

There are in our country elephants and other animals called dromedaries and also white horses and wild bulls of seven horns, white bears, and the strangest lions of red, green, black, and blue color. We have also wild asses with two little horns, wild hares as big as sheep, and swift horses with two little horns who gallop faster than any other animal. You should also know that we have birds called griffins who can easily carry an ox or a horse into their nest to feed their young. We have still another kind of birds who rule over all other fowl in the world. They are of fiery color, their wings are as sharp as razors, and they are called Yllerion. In the whole world there are but two of them. They live for sixty years, at the end of which they fly away to plunge into the sea. But first they hatch two or three eggs for forty days till the young ones come out. Then the old pair, father and mother, take off and go to drown themselves in the sea, as it was said before. And all the birds who meet them escort them till they are drowned. And when this has happened, the companions return and they go to the fledglings and feed them till they grow up and can fly and provide for themselves. Likewise, you should know that we have other birds called tigers who are so strong and bold that they lift and kill with ease an armored man together with his horse.

Know that in one province of our country is a wilderness and that there live horned men who have but one eye in front and three or four in the back. There are also women who look similar. We have in our country still another kind of men who feed only on raw flesh of men and women and do not hesitate to die. And when one of them passes away, be it their father or mother, they gobble him up without cooking him. They hold that it is good and natural to eat human flesh and they do it for the redemption of their sins. This nation is cursed by God and it is called Gog and Magog and there are more of them than of all other peoples. With the coming of the Antichrist they will spread over the whole world, for they are his friends and allies. This was the people that enclosed the King Alexander in Macedonia and put him into prison from which he escaped. But God will send upon them lightening and scorching fire which will burn and disperse them along with the Antichrist, and in such a way they will be destroyed and routed. None the less we take many of them with us into war, whenever we wish to wage one, and we give them license and permission to eat our enemies, so that of a thousand not a single remains who is not devoured and consumed. But later we send them home, because, if they were to stay with us longer, they would eat us all. We have in our country also other men who have hooved legs like horses and at the back of their heels they have four strong and sharp claws with which they fight in such a way that no armor can withstand them; and yet they are good Christians and willingly till their lands and ours and pay us annually a big tribute.

In another region of the wilderness we have a country that extends for forty-two days' journey and it is called the Great Feminie. Do not think that it is in the land of the Saracens, for the one we are talking about is in our country. In that land there are three queens and many other ladies who hold their lands from them. And when these three queens wish to wage war, each of them leads with her one hundred thousand armed women, not counting those who drive the carts, horses, and elephants with the supplies and food. And know that they fight bravely

like men. No male can stay with them over nine days, during which he can carouse and amuse himself and make them conceive. But he should not overstay, for in such a case he will die. This land is encircled by a river called Cyson that flows from the terrestrial paradise and is so wide that nobody can cross it except in big boats or ships.

Know also that between this land (and the river is a country) called Piconye which is small and extends only for ten days' journey in length and seven in breadth. Men are here as small as seven-year-old children and their horses are as small as sheep, and yet they are good Christians and willing workers. Nobody wages war on them except the birds who come each year when they have to harvest and to gather grapes. Then the king of this country equips himself to the best of his ability against the said birds and they have a dreadful carnage. Later, however, the birds return.

We have in our country bowmen who from the waist up are men, but whose lower part is that of a horse. They carry in their hands bows and arrows and they can pull harder than any human being and they live on raw flesh. Some of our courtiers capture them and keep them chained and people come to see this great marvel.

There are in our land also unicorns who have in front a single horn of which there are three kinds: green, black, and white. Sometimes they kill lions. But a lion kills them in a very subtle way. When a unicorn is tired it lies down by a tree. The lion goes then behind it and when the unicorn wants to strike him with his horn, it dashes into the tree with such a force that it cannot free itself. Then the lion kills it.

In another region of the wilderness there are men who used to be sixty cubits tall but who are now only twenty, and they cannot leave the desert, since it would displease God, for once they were outside, they could easily vanquish everybody. You should also know that in our country there is a bird called phoenix which is the most beautiful in the world. In the whole universe there is but one such bird. It lives for a hundred years and then it rises toward the sky so close to the sun that its wings catch fire. Then it descends into its nest and burns itself; and yet out of the ashes there grows a worm which at the end of a hundred days becomes again as beautiful a bird as it was ever before.

In our land there is also an abundance of bread, wine, meat, and of everything that is good for the human body. Know also that no venomous creature can enter certain parts of our country.

Between us and the Saracens there flows a river called Ydonis which comes from the terrestrial paradise and is full of precious stones. It flows through our land mostly in small and big arms and many precious stones are found there, such as emeralds, sapphires, jasper, calcedoines, rubies, carbuncles, "scabasses", and many other precious stones which I have not mentioned; and of each we know its name and its magic power.

There is in our land an herb called permanent. Whoever carries it with him can conjure the devil and question him as to who he is, where he is going, what he is doing on earth, and make him speak. Because of this, the devil does not dare to stay in our land.

Know also that in our country there grows wild pepper amidst trees and serpents. When it becomes ripe, we send our people to gather it. They put the woods on

fire and everything burns, but when the fire has died out, they make great heaps of pepper and serpents and they put the pepper together and carry it later to a barn, wash it in two or three waters, and let it dry in the sun. In this way it becomes black, hard, and biting.

Near this region is a fountain and whoever drinks of its water three times on an empty stomach will have no sickness for thirty years; and when he has drunk of it, he will feel as if he has eaten the best meat and spices, for it is full of God's grace. A person who can bathe in this fountain, be he of a hundred or thousand years, will regain the age of thirty-two. Know that we were born and blessed in the womb of our mother five hundred and sixty-two years ago and since then we have bathed in the fountain six times.

Let it be known to you that the Sandy Sea originates in our country and that it has a swift surf and produces frightful waves. Nobody can cross it, no matter how one tries, except us, for we let ourselves be carried by the griffins, as Alexander did when he was about to conquer the enchanted castle. Not far from this sea there flows a river in which one finds many precious stones and herbs that are good for many medicines.

Between us and the Jews there runs a river full of precious stones and it descends so swiftly that nobody can cross it except on Saturday when it stands still; and whatever it encounters, it carries into the Sandy Sea. We have to protect this crossing, for we have on this frontier forty-two castles which are the strangest and most beautiful in the world and many men to defend them, to wit ten thousand knights, six thousand crossbowmen and fifteen thousand archers, and forty thousand troopers who guard the aforesaid passages, so that, if the great King of Israel would come with his men, he could not get across with his Jews, who are twice as numerous as the Christians, but not as the Saracens, for they hold two thirds of the world. Know that the great King of Israel has under him three hundred kings and four thousand princes, dukes, and counts, all of them Jews and obedient to him. And if the Jews could cross this passage, all the Christians and Saracens would be lost.

On each Saturday we let some eight hundred or thousand Jews come across for the purpose of trade. They do not, however, enter our strongholds, but exchange the wares outside, because we do not trust them. They buy exclusively with ingots of gold and silver, for they do not have real money. After they have made their purchases, they return home. Know also that we have forty-two castles which are not farther apart than a crossbow shot.

Let it be known to you, that one league from there we have a city called the Great Orionde which is the strongest and most beautiful in the world. One of our kings guards it and he collects tribute from the great King of Israel, for he owes us every year two hundred horses loaded with precious stones, gold, and silver, in addition to the expenses incurred in this city and in the aforesaid castles. Know that when we make war on them, we kill all those who happen to be in our country and because of this they do not dare to stir, or attack us. Notice that the Jewish women are the most beautiful and passionate in the world.

Know that near the Sandy River there is the Sandy Sea and nobody can cross it, except when a strong wind spreads close to the ground, then one can easily enter it. Yet a person should hurry to return, for if he tarries, he could remain in the sea. And every piece of debris that comes out of it turns into precious stones;

but they cannot be sold before we have seen them, and if we wish to have them we can buy them at prices set by our merchants.

In another region of our land there is a mountain on which nobody can dwell because of its great heat. Certain worms who cannot live save in fire sustain themselves there. Near this mountain we keep constantly forty thousand men who maintain a great fire. And when these worms sense the heat of the fire and come out of the earth, they enter the flames and spin there a thread similar to the one made by the silkworms. Out of this thread we make garments for us and for our ladies and we wear them at the great holidays of the year. Whenever we wish to wash them, we put them into fire whence they come clean and fresh.

Know also that no Christian king has as many treasures as we do, because nobody can be poor in our country who wants to earn his living. Remember also that St. Thomas performs more miracles than all the saints of the paradise, for he preaches personally once a year in his church to everybody, and he also preaches in a palace as you will hear.

Let it be known to you that in another region of our country there are strange men who have human bodies, but heads of dogs. It is impossible to understand their language, yet they are good fishermen, since they can enter the deepest sea and stay there for a day without emerging. They catch as many fish as they desire and they carry them into their subterranean houses. We, however, mark the place where they put them and take as many as we want. These men bring woe on our wild beasts, for they eat them and they fight against the archers and battle them fiercely.

In our country there are also birds of a more hot-blooded nature than elsewhere. When the time of hatching comes, they lay twenty-one eggs on the bottom of the sea, and out of them come birds and they fly away. We catch many of them since they taste good when they are young. And if a man's or woman's health is failing and they eat of these birds, their vigor returns to them and they become as strong as before, or even stronger.

There grows in our country also the tree of life from which the holy oil is coming. This tree is completely dry and a serpent is guarding and watching it day and night, all the year round, except on Saint John's day, when it is fast asleep, and this is the time when we approach it. During the whole year it yields but three pounds which gather drop by drop. When we have come close to the holy oil, we take it and go back cautiously for fear that the serpent may pursue us. This tree is only a day's journey from the earthly paradise. When the serpent awakens, it becomes angry and hisses so loudly that it can be heard a day's march away. It is three times as big as a horse and it has nine heads and a pair of wings. And after we have crossed the sea, we turn around, while we proceed and take the holy oil to the Patriarch of St. Thomas and he consecrates it and anoints us Christians with it. The rest we send to the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and he in turn sends it to the Pope of Rome who blesses it and adds to it olive oil and sends it to all Christians beyond the sea.

There are no thieves in our country, neither among our citizens, nor among the foreigners, for God and St. Thomas would have confounded them, while we would have put them to death.

Let it be known to you that we have swift horses which can carry a knight in full armor for three or four days without taking food.

And whenever we go to war, we let fourteen kings, clad in garments of gold and silver, carry in front of us fourteen ensigns adorned with sundry precious stones. Other kings who come behind carry richly decorated banners of silk.

Know that in front of us there march forty thousand clerics and an equal number of knights, then come two hundred thousand men on foot, not counting the wagons with provisions or the elephants and camels which carry arms and ammunition. And when we leave for war, we entrust our country to the Patriarch of St. Thomas.

Yet when we ride out in peace, we let a simple wooden cross be borne before us, so that we are reminded of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Know that at the gates of each of our cities there are three crosses made of wood for people to worship the Holy Rood.

Likewise when we ride out in peace we order a vessel full of earth to be carried as a sign that we are dust and unto dust we shall return; another vessel full of gold is borne to show that we are the most powerful and noble king.

Let it be known to you that nobody in our land dares to commit the sin of lechery, for at once he would be burned, because the sacrament of marriage has been ordained by God; nor does anybody dare to lie in our country, for he would be hanged [immediately].

You should know that each year we visit in the desert the body of St. Daniel, the prophet. On this occasion we take with us ten thousand clerics and an equal number of knights and two hundred towers built on the elephants which also carry a turret to protect us from the seven-headed dragons. Know also that in this desert there are the finest dates that grow on trees and they are tasty, green, and ripe as well in winter as in summer. The desert stretches for eighty and sixty days' journey and there live two Patriarchs of St. Thomas who sit at the table in front of us, for they have the authority of the Pope of Rome. We have also as many abbots as there are days in a year taken twice and added fifteen. Each of them comes once during the year to chant at the altar of St. Thomas. We also sing there on the annual feast days, and on account of this we are called Prester John, for we are a priest because of sacrificing at the altar, and we are a king because we are just and upright.

Know that I had been blessed before I was born, for God has sent an angel to my father who told him to build a palace full of God's grace and a chamber of paradise for the child to come, who was to be the greatest king on earth and to live for a long time. And whoever stays in the palace will never suffer hunger, thirst, or death. When my father had woke up from his slumber, he was overly joyful and he began to build the palace which you will see.

First of all, its walls are of crystal, the ceiling above is of precious stones and it is adorned with stars similar to those of the sky, and its floor is also of crystal. There are no windows or doors in this palace and inside it has twenty-four columns of gold and various precious stones. We stay there during the big holidays of the year and in the midst of it St. Thomas preaches to the people. And inside our palace there is (water) and the best wine on earth, and whoever drinks of it has no desire for worldly things, and nobody knows where the [water] goes or whence it comes.

There is still another great marvel in our palace, for no food is served in it except on a tray, grill, or trencher that hangs from a column, so that when we sit at the table and wish to eat, the food is placed before us by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Know that all the scribes on earth could not report or describe the riches of our palace and our chapel. Everything we have written to you is as true as there is God, and for nothing in the world would we lie, since God and St. Thomas would confound us and deprive us of our title.

If you desire from us something that we can fulfill, do not hesitate to ask, for we shall do it gladly. We beg you to keep in mind the holy pilgrimage, and may it take place soon, and may you be brave and of great courage, and pray, do not forget to put to death those treacherous Templars and pagans and, please, send an answer with the envoy who brought the presents. We entreat the King of France to greet from us all loyal Christians beyond the sea and to send us some valiant knight of noblest French blood. We pray to our Lord to keep you in the grace of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Written in our holy palace in the year five hundred and seven since our birth."⁶⁷

It would appear that this letter is addressed to Manuel and not to Frederick or any other monarch.⁶⁸ Neither of the two Emperors hastened to reply to the letter of Prester John nor to develop a friendship with him. The only person interested in making contact with him was Pope Alexander III. He wrote a letter to his "dearest son in Christ John, illustrious and magnificent King of the Indians",⁶⁹ in which he pointed out that "he has heard from many persons and from common talk,.... that John is a Christian and is eager to do good works."⁷⁰ Indirectly, he suggests that his personal physician, Philip, had at some time in the past met Prester John, when sent to his court by the Pope. About Philip we hear no more, but his presence there may have been connected with several alleged requests of Prester John which the Pope accepted enthusiastically and granted. These were: to allow him to have

- 1) a chapel in the Holy Sepulchre;
- 2) a sanctuary near the Basilica of St. Peter; and
- 3) missionaries sent to evangelize his empire.

In the Pope's letter Prester John is described as "the King of the Indians". Since the third century A.D., the terms, "India" and "Ethiopia" had been interchangeable. In 1165, Johann von Wureburg, a visitor to the Holy Land, called the Ethiopians "Indians", a sufficient justification perhaps, for identifying the "Indians" of Pope Alexander's letter with the Ethiopians.⁷²

7) Harmonious Relations with Islam

Hostility and rivalry were common between the Muslim world and Christian countries of the West whereas Ethiopia enjoyed peace and harmony in its relations with Islam. Though the Ethiopians were aware of the situation in the Middle East they did not wish to become involved in the conflict. *Gedle Yimrehane Kristos* notes the complete absence in the Holy Land of the Ethiopians who, in the past, had been entrusted with the custody of the light in the Holy Sepulchre and had been responsible for bringing the light from the crypt of this church to the Patriarch during Easter night. Their absence no doubt was due to the conflict between the Crusaders and the Muslims because, despite

67. Slessarev, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-79.

68. C. F. Beckingham, *The Achievements of Prester John*, pp. 10-11.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

70. *Ibid.*

71. T. Tobler, *Descriptiones Terrae Sanctae ex saeculo, VIII. IX. XII. et XV.* (Leipzig, 1874), p. 190; cf. C. Meinardus, "The Ethiopians in Jerusalem", *op. cit.*, p. 117.

72. C. E. Beckingham, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

the persecution in the Holy Land, the Ethiopian Emperors sought a peaceful solution. The Muslim Sultans, for their part, did not want the conflict to expand southwards and so maintained friendly relations with both the Emperor of Ethiopia and the King of Nubia.⁷³

When the Holy Land was re-occupied by the Muslims led by Salah-Din in 1189, the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem along with other Oriental Christians migrated to Cyprus. There, together with the Copts, they founded the monastery of St. Antony in the coastal town of Famagosta, where they remained for a time. Eventually the Ethiopians left that monastery, went to Nicosia, and founded their church of The Saviour of the World.⁷⁴

In the year 1172 (A.H. 567) the Ethiopian Emperor sent an envoy laden with costly gifts to Caliph al-Adid (1150-1171). As the Caliph had died in the preceding year, the envoy met instead his successor Sultan Salah-Din to whom he presented the imperial letter and the gifts. Later in 1194 we hear that another delegation arrived in Cairo from Ethiopia⁷⁵ with a double mission. First to ask for a new Metropolitan, and secondly to settle the problems connected with the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem. In both cases the delegation achieved success. He requested that the Ethiopians be allowed to resettle in the Holy Place and that they be granted certain concessions. Salah-Din responded favourably to the request and gave orders that of Catechumena be given two rooms to live in. For their service they were permitted to have their own chapels of the Invention of the Cross in the Holy Land in which to build their cells.⁷⁶ In addition they were able to buy land sufficient for their needs from the Arab inhabitants in the Holy Land. With the Greeks, Georgians and Copts, they also enjoyed another privilege granted by Salah-Din to the Christian communities - they were exempted from paying fees for entry to Jerusalem.⁷⁷

Ethiopians had also settled in Egypt. Towards the end of the twelfth century we learn that an Ethiopian Christian community existed in the Wadi'n Natran and that, as Maqrizi writes, the monastery of Saint Elias was run by Ethiopian monks. "It is probable that the Abyssinians did not build for themselves a new monastery, but occupied by grant or by purchase the above-mentioned all of Pehôout, since the name is Coptic".⁷⁸ When this monastery was destroyed, however, the monks were obliged to disperse and some of them sought shelter in the monastery of St. John the Short.⁷⁹ In another part of Egypt the Ethiopian community continued to flourish. Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments, was a natural place for Christian monks to gather. Ethiopians, Copts, Armenians and Georgians resided either inside or in the vicinity of the monastery there,⁸⁰ and for some centuries Ethiopian monks continued to be associ-

ated with the place. Today one may find a few Ethiopian manuscripts belonging to the fourteenth century in this monastery.⁸¹ Two centuries later, W. Lithgow, a visitor to Mount Sinai (1582), saw some two hundred Ethiopian monks there.⁸²

In 1194 A.D. two decades after the previous visit by an envoy of the Ethiopian Emperor, another envoy appeared at the court of the Sultan in Cairo. This time he had been sent to request a new Metropolitan for Ethiopia. The Sultan agreed, gave orders to the Patriarch to arrange the ordination and both the envoy and the Metropolitan returned to Ethiopia.⁸³

Such ease in dealing with religious matters extended to trading relations as well. Both land and sea routes⁸⁴ were of importance to those engaged in trade between the two countries. According to al-Idrisi, camels were the main means of transportation used by the Ethiopians. An important meeting point was a place called Boulac where Egyptian Nubian and Ethiopian merchants gathered and where peace reigned.⁸⁵ Trade by sea was conducted largely through Zalegh (Zeila), the main port for Ethiopia. Though small in size it was very active and, as a port, provided good markets for any kind of merchandise.⁸⁶ The chronicler of Arslan, Shah of Persia (A.H. 494-536/1100-1141 A.D.) relates that caravans from Asia Minor, Khoqsan and Iraq passed through Persia to their destinations in Ethiopia, Zanzibar and China.⁸⁷ From Ethiopia exports included slaves and silver, according to Idrisi. Gold, he observed, was rare,⁸⁸ and the people dressed in linen and cotton, both apparently imported materials. While Zeila dominated as a port, it is clear from a letter written by a well-known Adenese Indian trader in the thirtieth or forties of the twelfth century that Dahlak (Massawa) was no longer suitable as a trading centre. Those merchants who visited there suffered great hardship and it emphasized in other Geniza papers that the ruler of Dahlak was himself a pirate. Control over the region had diminished with the removal of the capital city to an area further inland. For practical reasons as well, the Zagwe Emperors preferred the port of Zeila to Massawa. On this occasion one should perhaps need to underline the major role of the Ethiopians in international trade. The Ethiopians did not limit their trading activities to the supply of goods to foreign merchants who visited their port. This was a period of considerable economic development and they carried on a thriving trade in various foreign countries. They joined the "Karimi"⁹⁰ corporation in the early days of its existence and visited various countries in connection with it.⁹¹ In Alexandria, Ethiopians had settled

73. "A Christian regime in the Nile valley would deal a deadly blow to Islam and perhaps enable the Crusaders to open up connections with the isolated churches of Nubia and Abyssinia. Nuraddin for his part realized that." (J.J. Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, (London, 1965), pp. 163-164; E. Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina*, Vol I, p. 25 n. 3).

74. E. Cerulli, *op.cit.*, pp. 33-37; *Idem*, "Two Ethiopian Tales on the Christians of Cyprus": *Abba Salama*, 1. (1970), pp. 184-185; J. Hackett, *A History of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus*, (London, 1901), p. 526.

75. S. Labib, *Handelsgeschichte Aegyptens im Spätmittelalter* (1171-1517), (Wiesbaden, 1965), p. 48.

76. O. Meinardus, "The Ethiopians in Jerusalem", p. 117; E. Cerulli, *op. cit.* p. 32; J.S. Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 56.

77. O. Meinardus, *op.cit.*, p. 117.

78. H.G. Evelyn-White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi'n Natrân; The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and of Scetis: Natrân*, Part II, (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1932), p. 368.

79. O. Meinardus, *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Deserts*, (Cairo, 1961), p. 258. This Christian Ethiopian community continued to exist up to the nineteenth century. (O. Meinardus, *Christian Egypt, Ancient and Modern*, (Cairo, 1965), p. 161).

80. O. Meinardus, *Christian Egypt*, p. 376.

81. Murad Kamil, "Les manuscrits éthiopiens du Sinai": *AE* 2 (1957), pp. 83-90.

82. O. Meinardus, *Christian Egypt*, p. 378.

83. S. Labib, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

84. A. Jaubert, *Géographie d'Édrisi*, (Paris, 1836), Vol. I, p. 41.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 39 ff.; S. Labib, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

87. P.M. Sykes, *A History of Persia*, 2. Vols., (London, 1930), Vol. II, p. 41.

88. A. Jaubert, *op.cit.*, pp. 39-40; S. Labib includes ivory as an export item, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

89. The ruler of Dahlak, which corresponds approximately to modern Massawa, is described as a "dangerous pirate by S.D. Goitein, "New Light on the Beginnings of the Karim Merchants": *JESHO* 1 (1958), p. 11.

90. This term still remains unexplained but it was a term attributed to merchants dealing mainly with trade in spices and pepper. Ethnically, the members were of different nationalities but most, if not all, were Muslims. Their commercial activities extended from Egypt to India. (W.J. Fischel, "The Spice Trade Mamluk Egypt": *JESHO*, 1 (1958), p. 158 ff.; S. D. Goitein, "New Light on the Beginnings of the Karim Merchants," p. 183).

91. About the year of the formation of the association W.J. Fischel, *op. cit.*, p. 160, states: "The year 11 (557 H.) is still the earliest year in which the Karimi are first mentioned, and this in connection with the payment of the zakat for four years upon their arrival from Aden in Egypt. It can be assumed nevertheless, that their activities go back earlier than this year 1181 though documentary evidence is still lacking".

to the extent that they had their own land and had built houses and storage facilities for their goods.⁹² A contemporary traveller, Benjamin of Tudela, provided further evidence when he included Ethiopians among those merchants of different nationalities present in Alexandria.⁹³

Relations between Ethiopia and Yemen went beyond mere trading contacts. In Zabid (Lat. 140' 12), a town in Tihama located between the Yemen highlands and the Red Sea about sixteen miles from the coast, an Ethiopian dynasty as well-known as the Abyssinian Mamluk dynasty had established itself. Founded in A.H. 412/1021 A.D. by Najah, an Ethiopian slave of the last mayor of the palace of the Ziyadid dynasty, they were known as Najahids. Najah himself ruled Zabid until his death in 1060.⁹⁴ The dynasty was supported by Ethiopians who had been sold as slaves and had adapted the Arabic culture to their own needs. In spite of constant conflict and revolt, this dynasty survived for a little over a century. The following is a list of the Najahid rulers ⁹⁵

A.H.	A.D.	REMARKS
412-452 Mu'ayyad Najah	1021-1060	
454-473 Ali Da'i Sulayhid	1060-1062	alien to the dynasty
473-482 Sai'd Ahwal b. Najah	1062-1080	
482-498 Jayyash b. Najah	1080-1089	from 1080 Zabid
498-503 Fatik Jayyash	1089-1104	remained under
503-517 Mansur b.-Fatik	1104-1109	Najah rule
c. 517-531 Fatik II-Mansur	1109-c. 1123	until 1159
531-554 Fatik III b.-Muhammad b.-Mansur	1136-1159	

The most famous of these was Kaid Abu Mohammad Surur Amhara al Fatik. About him Ibn Khaldun writes: "He belonged to the Abyssinian tribe of *Amharah*,⁹⁶ and all I can relate of him is but a drop in the sea of his great merit."⁹⁷ Three years after his assassination in A.H. 551/1156, A.D. Zabid and its dependencies were conquered by Ali ibn Mahdy⁹⁸. The location of Zabid on the road between Mecca and Aden meant that it was an important commercial centre. Idrisi observed that it was a rich and densely populated town and that goods sold there were brought by ship from such places as Hejas, Ethiopia and Egypt.⁹⁹ He also provides further geographical information about Ethiopia.¹⁰⁰ Her boundary on the north was the Beja land. In the east was the Red Sea, and to the southeast Berbera.¹⁰¹ He states that half of Berbera belonged to Ethiopia and that the other half was ruled by an independent king.¹⁰² From this information it would appear that there had been no substantial change in the map of Ethiopia.

92. Al-Maqrizi, *A Short History of the Copts*, trans. S. C. Malan (London, 1873), p. 95. In this connection the same author says that Patriarch John VI (1171-1193) who was previously a layman and merchant was "buried in the plot of ground that belonged to the Abyssinians."

93. *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, trans. and ed. A. Asher, 2 Vols. (London, 1840), Vol. I, p. 157.

94. S. S. Lane-Poole, *The Mohammadan Dynasties*, (Beirut, 1966), pp. 90-92.

95. S. Lane-Poole, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

96. It is interesting to note that the chronicle of Harar recorded the flight of the Amhara Muslims from the land of Wargih in A.H. 522/1128 A.D. (E. Cerulli, "Il Sultanato dello Scioa nel secolo XIII, secondo un nuovo documento storico": *RSE* 1 (1941), p. 18.

97. Ibn Khaldun, *Yaman, Its Early Mediaeval History*, trans. H.C. Kay, (London, 1892), p. 117.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

99. A. Jaubert, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 49.

100. Compare with map in an article by C. Conti Rossini, "Geographica: L'Africa Orientale in carte arabe dei secoli XII e XIII": *RSE* 3 (1943), p. 168 ff.

101. A. Jaubert, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

102. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

CHAPTER XII

THE REIGN OF LALIBELA AND THE FALL OF THE ZAGWE DYNASTY

1. The life of Lalibela (1160-1211?)

The reign of Lalibela is the only bright spot in the history of this period. Fortunately we have considerable information about him, some of which is from quite reliable sources. First there is his *Gedle* which recounts events in his childhood.¹ According to this source, he was the son of Jan Seyoum, governor of Bugna in the province of Lasta. From traditional sources we learn that his mother's name was Kirwana² and that she was a house maid in the home of Jan Seyoum. When she became pregnant by him, her wife became angry. Sensing her mistress's disapproval, Kirwana decided to flee to a place called Roha, today known as Lalibela. There she gave birth to her son. Leaving him there alone, she returned to the house of Jan Seyoum again. The governor sent out a party to look for the boy and at Roha they found him surrounded by a swarm of bees. This was considered a sign of his future power³ and to commemorate the event they called him Lalibela, which in Agaw means that the bees have recognized his sovereignty. His brother Harbe who was the rightful sovereign naturally did not view him with favour because of this prophecy. For this reason, Lalibela eventually left Lasta and went to Jerusalem where he remained for many years. On his return to Ethiopia he married Meskal Kibabaw but as Harbe was still intent on persecuting him he was obliged to flee with his wife to the desert. Ultimately Lalibela did ascend the throne but views as to how this was achieved appear to differ. One source suggests that Harbe, realizing that Lalibela's success was inevitable, voluntarily abdicated in his favour and crowned him under the name of Gebre Meskal. However, according to a chronicle from Gojjam, Lalibela, faced with continued persecution by Harbe, allied himself with the Amhara. His intention was to wage war against Harbe and to ensure their support, he promised them key positions if he succeeded in occupying the throne. Delighted with this promise, the Amhara agreed to join forces with him. Harbe, for his part, rallied behind him the seven clans of the Agaw people. In the ensuing battle Lalibela was victorious and claimed power. True to his promise he removed all Agaws and other high-ranking officials, replacing them with Amhara—hence the Amharic proverb:

አማራ ሲለግድ "Amhara settled

አገሩ ሲሰድ Agaw exiled".⁴

1. J. Perruchon, *Vie de Lalibela, roi d'Éthiopie*, (Paris, 1892); National Library, (Zewge Welde Sa *Gedle Lalibela*, Amharic trans. (Addis Ababa, 1959). For further source see next, p. n. 5.

2. It seems that she is canonized as a saint by the Church of Ethiopia. According to a MS. of Bete Medhanealem she is commemorated on the 12th of Meskerem (23rd of September).

3. This legend is also found in Greek, Roman and Arabic literature. Swarms of bees were generally considered a royal symbol. Chihab ed-Din, *Histoire de la conquête de l'Abyssinie*, trans. R. Basset, (F. 1897), n. 1, pp. 26-27.

4. Tekle Giorgis, *Chronicle of Ethiopia*, MS., pp. 15-16.

The version according to *Zena Lalibela*⁵ is slightly different. His mother Kirwerna was from a noble family of Wag. When she married she earned the title በዓልተ በገት.⁶ In 1120 she gave birth to a son and called him Lalibela. On 8 Yekatit (16 Feb.), on the Holiday of Simeon, the new-born child was baptized in the church of *Arba'etu Ensessa* and he was named Zer'a Simeon. When he was 9 years old, (1129) his father Jan Seyoum died at the age 73 and was buried in the cave church of Sarzina Michael. His son Harbé whose throne name was Gebre Mariam succeeded him. The young Lalibela received his elementary education at home. Later he went to Mertula Mariam in Gojjam for further studies. There because of his special character and intelligence, his fellow students hated him and caused many evil things to be done to him which obliged him to leave his school. He returned to Lasta where again he encountered many difficulties. He married Meskal Kibra and then left for Jerusalem leaving her in Medebay in Tigré. Returning to Roha, after a short time he succeeded his brother on the throne.⁷

In his dedicatory writing Lalibela states: በአኩቲ አብ ወወልድ ወመንፈስ ቅዱስ አጉለትኩ አክሰምኩ ወአምነይኩ እነ ሐፃኒ ላሲበላ ወስመ መንግሥትየ ገብረ መስቀል በ፲፯፻፳፱ ዓመተ ምሕረት ለመ ፩ ለወርገ ታ[ገላሲ] ብእሲ ዓሣል ዘኢይትመዋቅ ለፀር በገይለ መስቀሉ ለኢየሱስ ክርስቶስ ወልድ ሞራራ ወልደ ዛንሥዩም ወልደ አስዳ ።

"Exalting the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, I Hasani Lalibela, whose throne name is Gebre Meskal, powerful man invincible to his enemy in the power of the Cross of Jesus Christ, son of Morara, son of Jan Seyum, son of Asseda, donated land to Aksum and made it property of the monastery in 1089 (1200 A.D.?) on the fifth of Tahsas (13th December)".⁸

In *Zena Lalibela* we find a similar text which can explain more clearly the one above: በአኩቲ አብ ወወልድ ወመንፈስ ቅዱስ አጉለትኩ ወአክሰምኩ ወአምነይኩ እነ ሐፃኒ ላሲበላ ወስመ መንግሥትየ ገብረ መስቀል ዘእነገሠኒ አምላኪየ በ፲ወ፭ ዓመት እምልደተ መድኃኒት ለመፈጸሟ ለታገሣሥ ብእሲ ዓሣል ዘኢይትመዋቅ ለፀር በገይለ መስቀሉ ለኢየሱስ ክርስቶስ ወልድ ሞራራ ወልደ ዛንሥዩም ወልደ ኪርወርና ።⁹

"Exalting the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit I Hasani Lalibela whose

5. This MS. was copied very recently by *memhir* Gebre Meskal Tesfaye, abbot of Genete Mariam in Lasta from a MS. found in the church of Teqema Michael in Wag near the border of Tigré. The copyist tried to translate most of the Ge'ez text into Amharic. It is deposited in the Library of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies MS. No. 298. The author of this work is a certain Hareyene Egzi contemporary of Emperor Lalibela. As he asserts in the beginning of the work, he was serving in a church in Bugna built by Gebre Meskal, Emperor of Aksum in the sixth century A.D. While he was teaching scriptural interpretation there, Lalibela selected him among all the learned people in the empire to be a teacher in the imperial court and eventually he appointed him Aqabé Se'at. Following that he became court chronicler. In this capacity he was always with the emperor and he recorded what was happening daily in the court and what the emperor was doing. He became involved in this work in the 39th year of the reign of Lalibela, 1207, and completed it a year later after the death of the emperor in 1212. The author swears that he recorded only what he saw and what he heard. He stressed that he had not added anything beyond the facts. (*Zena Lalibela*, p. 8 ff.) It is interesting to note that a similar name Kristos Hereyo, appears in *Gedle Lalibela* (J. Perruchon *op. cit.*; p. 44). In fact he does not appear as chronicler but as cupbearer of the Emperor Lalibela. However, he may be the same person whose name intentionally or unintentionally was changed slightly by either copyist. As regards his position, in both cases it shows the intimacy which he enjoyed with the Emperor.

6. The word appears later in the chronicles of Zer'a Ya'qob and his son Be'de Mariam in one word. በአልቴሐት. It was a title of the emperor's wife, which perhaps was later abbreviated and became አቴጌ. See J. Perruchon, *Les chroniques de Zar'a Ya'qob et de Ba'eda Maryam rois d'Éthiopie 1434-1478*, (Paris, 1893), p. 16 n. 4. For the other passages where this title appears see index p. 186 under ቀኝ በአልቴሐት.

7. *Zena Lalibela*, p. 19 ff.

8. C. Conti Rossini, "L'evangelo d'oro di Dabra Libanos": *RRAL*, ser. 5, Vol. X (1901), p. 186.

9. *Zena Lalibela*, *op.cit.*, p. 118.



Emperor Lalibela.

Courtesy of Prof. J. Ch.

throne name is Gebre Meskal, powerful man invincible to the enemy by power of the Cross of Jesus Christ, son of Morara, son of Jan Seyoum, son Kirwerna, donated land to Aksum and made it the property of the monastery the 18th year after my Lord has put me on the throne in 1178¹⁰ from the Birt Our Saviour, on the 29 Tahsas¹¹ (6 January)."

There is a striking similarity between the style of these two texts and the inscriptions of Ezana. But unlike Ezana he does not mention the countries over which he reigned nor does he use the title "Negus". Instead he uses "Hasani", a title once used by Dajim. In another dedicatory inscription he mentions his wife Meskal Kibra and the Metropolitan Abba Michael.¹² However, in the texts quoted above his concern was to emphasize his military superiority. The impression is created that he waged a series of wars against his enemies in which he was always successful. Like Ezana, Lalibela attributes his victory to God and the power of the Cross of Jesus Christ. At the same time he points out the magnitude of his military power by using an old term ሃላጸ. ¹³ He also mentions lineage beginning with the founder of the Zagwe dynasty, Morara, an abbreviated form of Mera Tekle Haimanot. In this regard, there is, however, one difference between the style of the dedicatory writing of Ham, Abba Libanos and that of *Zena Lalibela*. In the case of Ham, Asseda is mentioned while the latter has the name of his mother. The question is who was this person and what relation did he have to Lalibela. As we still have no further reference it is rather difficult to answer this question. However, it may be another name of Kirwerna, the mother of Lalibela.

Foreign literary sources provide us with further information about Lalibela. In the life of Abba John, the 74th Patriarch, it is stated that he was Shenuda and that the meaning of his name was "lion". His wife was called Meskal Kibra and he had two sons; the elder was Yitbarek and the younger Atyab¹⁴ (Inab or Iitab?). It is also mentioned that the family of Lalibela originated from Bugna and that his capital city was called Adefa.¹⁵ Abu Salih,¹⁶ a contemporary writer, described his empire. Of his power he comments: "...he is the fourth of the kings of the earth, and no king on earth is strong enough to resist him".¹⁷ His empire was so vast that a traveller must take a whole year to travel from one end to another, but as he, Abu Salih, had come to Ethiopia by the land route he knew only the northern boundary. In some chronicles the extent of this empire is given more precisely: from the (Blue) Nile to Massawa from Wenchit to Sennar and Metema; from Harar to Zeila, Argellé; from Jimma to Chacha; from Sidamo to the (White) Nile and Ke'mel.¹⁸ Oral tradition more or less confirms this account. At that time the empire was sub-divided into four provinces: 1) the northern-most province with its capital at Aksum which extended from the Red Sea (Massawa) to the River Werr, south of Aksum. The governor of this province was the Dean of the Cathedral of Aksum, Nibure Ed, and he had the privilege of sitting on a golden chair on the right of the Emperor; 2) the central province

10. This is according to the Ethiopian calendar. The equivalent Gregorian date is 1185.

11. Conti Rossini, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

12. *Ibid.*

13. The word appears in the inscription of Abreha CII line 4-5 and the commentator equates it with ሃላጸ, which has also the meaning of Emperor, (Vol. II, p. 287).

14. The author as a foreigner could not transliterate correctly the Ethiopian name. Nevertheless it is worth mentioning that in Ethiopian sources so far available there is no mention of Yitbarek's brother. He appears as the only son of Lalibela.

15. J. Perruchon, "Note pour l'histoire d'Éthiopie: Extrait de la vie d'Abba Jean, 74^e patriarche d'Alexandrie relatif à l'Abyssinie": *Revue Sémitique* 7 (1899), p. 85.

16. Abu Salih, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and some Neighbouring Countries*, ed. and tr. B. Evetts, (Oxford, 1895), p. 284 ff.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

18. Tekle Yesus, *Chronicle of Ethiopia*, MS., p. 16. See also, *Zena Lalibela*, p. 37 ff.

which extended from the Werr to the Beshilo River and from the Blue Nile to Zobel, a mountain in Azebo. The Dean of the churches of Roha, Liqe Kahinat, governed the province and it was his right to sit on the Emperor's left; 3) this province included the whole of north-west Ethiopia from Alay to the Blue Nile. It was governed by Rise Riouzan, Dean of Mertula Mariam, who sat next to Nibure Ed on the Emperor's right; 4) the final province comprised the southern part of Ethiopia and was administered by the Dean of Tedbabe Mariam who had the title of Patriarch and sat on the left side of the Emperor next to Liqe Kahinat.¹⁹ In addition to administering these provinces each of the four governors had another duty to fulfill. Nibure Ed was a high court judge, Liqe Kahinat supervised the whole administrative machinery, Rise Riouzan was responsible for ecclesiastical affairs and the Patriarch was, to some extent, the liaison officer between Church and State. This arrangement accounts for the statement about Lalibela that: "He used the influence of the clergy to consolidate his dynasty."²⁰

2. External Policy

Lalibela established friendly contacts with the world outside Ethiopia. When he came to the throne, the persecution of Christians in Egypt ceased and trade was resumed. Abd al-Latif, an Arab writer observed: "In the month of Shawwāl, an envoy arrived from the king of the Abyssinians, bearing a letter which contained the announcement of the death of their metropolitan, and requested the appointment of his successor."²¹ This was during the reign of Malik el-Adel when the Patriarch of Alexandria was John VI (1200-1218). The Ethiopian delegation arrived in the same year as El-Adel assumed power. As the Coptic Church had not yet recovered from the persecution it had suffered in the past at the hands of El-Mansour, the envoy found only the ruins of churches and monasteries. Many priests and monks had died as well. Under these circumstances it was difficult to find a new Metropolitan. Members of the delegation were sent to Wadi-Habib and other monasteries but they returned to Cairo without a candidate. For three months the envoy searched in vain. Finally he approached El-Adel and explained that he had received strict orders not to return to Ethiopia without a new Metropolitan. On hearing this, El-Adel gave orders to the Patriarch to find a man suitable for the position. His choice was Mulabbas Michael (Kilus),²² bishop of Fuwa. His parish had been completely destroyed and its inhabitants had fled during the persecution. He returned to Ethiopia with the envoy. In the capital city of the Zagwe dynasty, Adefa²³ near Roha, he was received with great honour and respect. Lalibela himself, accompanied by dignitaries and high-ranking officials, journeyed three days' distance from the town to welcome the new Metropolitan. On the latter's arrival, he was given a special residence with all furniture and services provided. Ten priests and ten laymen, carefully selected from good families, were appointed as his trusted servants to guard the treasury of the Metropolitan which consisted of gold, silver and precious stones. His first Mass was an auspicious occasion.

19. Bete Mariam, Gospel MS. at the end parchment; *Zena Lalibela*, p. 37; Berhane Meskal Desta, *Zena Lal yi belal*, (Addis Ababa, 1959), (Amharic), pp. 88-90.

20. J.S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, (London, 1954), pp. 56-57. In *Zena Lalibela* we are told that he appointed generals, a chamberlain, a treasurer, a special army officer for the army stationed on the border of his empire and a roving ambassador, p. 37.

21. Abu Salih, *op.cit.*, p. 285 n. 3.

22. In this respect the version of *Zena Lalibela*, p. 38, is the following: Lalibela sent fifteen monks to Alexandria to ask the then Patriarch Michael for a new Metropolitan. They went there by land, via Nubia. It seems that they used the same route on their way back home taking with them one Metropolitan named Justus, and assistant bishops Gerilos and Giorgis the former quite often is referred to in Ethiopian and the latter in Egyptian sources.

23. According to *Zena Lalibela* his capital was መካነ ልዕሊት commonly known as መካልዕት.

cious occasion. During the past year the country had experienced a drought but with the new Metropolitan was celebrating Mass heavy rain began to fall. With happiness and rejoicing the people acclaimed him as a true man of God.

This impression was reconsidered five years later when Michael returned to Egypt. His decision displeased the Patriarch but he believed he had reason to return. He explained that while the King had been away at war, the Queen Meskal Gibrit (Meskal Kibra) had insisted that he ordain her brother Gebron (Gedrou or Hirun) bishop of the capital city. Once ordained, he had assumed the Metropolitan's power and the people and clergy had sided with him. Moreover, Michael alleged that Gebron (or Hirun) had sent a group of people to his residence with the intention of having him killed. To escape death he had left the country and returned to Egypt. Many people (about 500) had accompanied him but, on his advice, most had returned home after three days' travel. Of those who insisted on escorting him to Egypt, all, except one man and one woman, had died of thirst or hunger in the desert.²⁴

After examining the report of Michael, Patriarch John selected a priest named Moses as envoy to the court of Lalibela. He was sent with a letter enquiring about the reason for Michael's return. Subsequently the Patriarch discovered that his departure had been precipitated by the death of one of the ten priests assigned to him. This priest had been Michael's treasurer. One day, "on bare suspicion of having purloined a golden staff of great value, Kilus had caused the priest to be seized, and scourged to death". The punishment for murder followed the principle of "an eye for an eye",²⁶ thus the Metropolitan faced possible death. As the priest's relatives also were anxious for an opportunity to avenge his murder, the Metropolitan had fled from Ethiopia and returned to Egypt. Furthermore, Moses discovered that while it was true that the Queen had asked Michael to ordain Gebron, he remained a titular bishop without any functions which distinguished him from other priests. Armed with this information, Moses had returned to Egypt accompanied by a further delegation from Lalibela as he deemed it wise to request another Metropolitan. The gifts which they carried with them for both the Patriarch and the Sultan included a gold crown for the former and animals not found in Egypt such as a lion, an elephant, giraffe and zebra. The quality and quantity of the gifts reflected well on Emperor Lalibela and earned him the goodwill of the recipients and the people. There was agreement that a new Metropolitan be found but first it was necessary to settle the case of Michael. A council formed of both clergy and laity assembled in the largest church in Cairo and there it decided that Michael's punishment should be excommunication. This was done in the presence of a large crowd of Muslims and Christians.²⁷

The selection of the new Metropolitan revolved around two monks from the monastery of St. Anthony both of whom served the Patriarch in his residence (the Patriarchate). Both were admired for their erudition and for their righteous life. The Patriarch selected the younger, Isaac, as the Metropolitan and ordained the elder, Joseph, as priest. Both returned with the delegation to Ethiopia where they were received with great joy.²⁸

24. J. Perruchon, *op.cit.*, *Revue Sémitique*, 6 (1898), pp. 267-271; pp. 366-372 (trans. from the Arabic text *Ibid.*, 7 (1899), pp. 76-88.

25. O. Meinardus, *Monks and Monasteries*, p. 39.

26. "If he beats (his victim) excessively and without pity, he shall be punished as a murderer." (Abba Paulk Zada), *The Fetha Nagast, the Law of the Kings*, (Addis Ababa, 1968), p. 292.

27. D. L. O'Leary, *The Ethiopian Church*, (London, 1936), p. 52.

28. J. Perruchon, *op.cit.*, *Revue Sémitique*, 7 (1899), p. 84.

The Ethiopians had made such an impression in Egypt that on their return they were accompanied by a number of people curious to see the land of this powerful Emperor. Among these was Abu Salih, an Armenian by origin, now living in Egypt.

3. Internal Conditions

In his book, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighbouring Countries*, Abu Salih provides us with an eyewitness account, though fragmentary and sometimes vague, particularly about details of geography. He states, for example, that "Abyssinia is contiguous to India and the adjacent territory",²⁹ and further, "When the king of Abyssinia wishes to make the tour of his country, he spends a whole year in going round it, travelling on all days except Sundays³⁰ and the festivals of the Lord, until he returns to his capital city."³¹ Although he was in the capital city, he does not discuss it.

His portrait of the Emperor depicts him as "...white and red of complexion, with red hair".³² He claimed to be "of the family of Moses and Aaron, on account of the coming of Moses into Abyssinia."³³ As discussed before, this claim was obviously an invention, the Emperor was actually an Orthodox of Coptic denomination. Abu Salih also commented on his priestly role: "All the kings of Abyssinia are priests, and celebrate the liturgy within the sanctuary, as long as they reign without slaying any man with their own hand; but after slaying a man, they can no longer celebrate the liturgy".³⁴ At the coronation of an Emperor, "All the kings of Abyssinia are crowned with the royal crown in the church of the angel Michael, or the church of Saint George, beneath their pictures."³⁵ About the coronation ceremony he has this to say: "The metropolitan blesses him, and lays his hand upon his head, and fastens a band over his head and beneath his chin, and clothes him in a robe of brocade".³⁶ The Emperor was the supreme administrator and supreme judge. To fulfill his judicial functions he toured the whole territory within one year. When he judged he sat "on the throne of King David".³⁷ The coins minted were called *Aftqahis* and were cast "of iron, and these are like a broad spit, and have at the end, the impression of the king's seal."³⁸ He also introduced a tax system based on the assessment of personal property.

The religious situation at that time favoured the growth of Christianity and it was preached almost everywhere in the Empire. "In every town of Abyssinia there is one church, as spacious as it can possibly be".³⁹ The moral standards of the Christians; were high and they abided by Christian ethics. "Formerly it was customary with all the kings of Abyssinia as well as their subjects to have several wives."⁴⁰ Holy days were not as great in number then. Saturday was not observed and Abu Salih mentions only four annual holidays: the feast of the great nativity—Christmas; the feast of the glorious

29. Abu Salih, *op.cit.*, p. 285.

30. Apparently Saturday was not yet introduced as a holiday.

31. Abu Salih, *op.cit.*, p. 485.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 288. In his life story it is stated that "his cheeks were as red as Roman apple", National Library, *Gedle Lalibela*, p. 39. But in the text published by Perruchon this phrase does not seem to exist.

33. Abu Salih, *op.cit.*, p. 290.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 286-287.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 290.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 288. About the coming of Moses to Ethiopia see above, p. 241 n. 12.

baptism—Epiphany; the feast of the Holy Resurrection—Easter; and the feast of illuminating cross—Meskal.⁴¹ If one considers, however, the fact that some of the church of Roha were dedicated to Saints (Mary, Libanos and Denagil), to martyrs (Merqorew and George), and angels (Michael and Gebriel) one can say that their holy days were observed also. An important possession of the Ethiopians was "the Ark of the Covenant in which are the two tables of stone, inscribed by the finger of God with the commandments".⁴² Further he describes the Ark saying "the Ark of the Covenant is placed upon the altar but is not so wide as the altar; it is as high as the knee of a man, and overlaid with gold; and upon its lid there are crosses of gold; and there are five precious stones upon it, one at each of the four corners, and one in the middle. The liturgy is celebrated upon the Ark four times in the year..."⁴³ He further mentions that the head of the Church in Ethiopia was an Egyptian Metropolitan sent by the See of Alexandria to ordain priests and deacons⁴⁴. Conditions for Muslims appeared to have been satisfactory. He observed that many Muslims lived in Ethiopia and paid the *Aftqahis*⁴⁵ to the Emperor.⁴⁶ Lalibela, in turn, seemingly tolerated them and harmonious relations existed between Christians and Muslims. Such an attitude on the part of the Emperor perhaps assisted the expansion of Islam in eastern and southern Ethiopia when Muslim states were established. According to Aboul Feda, Ibn Sayd commented that inhabitants of Ifat professed Islam,⁴⁷ and that the coastal regions, including the port Zeila,⁴⁸ were also inhabited by Muslims.⁴⁹ Further evidence of the extent of Islamic penetration are the many Arabic grave inscriptions in southern Ethiopia. Two of them are dated A.H. 662/1263 A.D. and A.H. 667/1267-8 A.D.⁵⁰

Lalibela was a devout Christian Emperor. His contribution to the Church extended from the donation of land to many prominent monasteries and churches in northern Ethiopia⁵¹ to the construction of the eleven monolithic churches of Roha hewn from solid rock. These latter churches are located in three groups:

4) The Rock-hewn Churches

Group I	Group II	Group III
1) Bete Medhane Alem	7) Bete Ammanuel	11) Bete Giorgis
2) Bete Mariam	8) Bete Merqorewos	
3) Bete Michael	9) Bete Libanos	
4) Bete Meskal	10) Bete Gebriel	

41. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 287. This is the first reference to the existence of the Ark of the Covenant by a foreign writer.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 287-288.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

45. Trimmingham translates the word as "ingots of iron"; *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 63. S. Labib states that Egyptian gold and silver coins were circulating in Ifat in the same century, *op.cit.*, p. 272.

46. Abu Salih, *op.cit.*, p. 290.

47. Aboul Feda, *Géographie d'Aboulfeda*, trans. M. Reinaud, (Paris, 1848), Vol. III, p. 14.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 231; J.S. Trimmingham, *op.cit.*, pp. 62-63.

49. Aboul Feda, *op.cit.*, p. 226.

50. E. Littmann, "Arabische Inschriften aus Abessinien": *Zeitschrift fuer Semitistik*, 3 (1924), pp. 241-2; G.W. Huntingford, "Arabic Inscriptions in Southern Ethiopia": *Antiquity* 29 (1955), p. 232.

51. C. Conti Rossini, "L'evangelo d'oro di Dabra Libanos", p. 186 ff. Some traditional sources emphasized that he abolished idolatry from the Haik region. "The Emperor Lalibela ordered the church to be built there in former times, in order to uproot the worship of the Devil by heathens; sorcerers who offered him many oxen and cows in sacrifice underneath a bower of Endod." C.F. Trimmingham, and G.W. Huntingford, *Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646*; (Hakluyt Society, London, 1906), p. 99; Tekle Yesus, *Chronicle of Ethiopia*, p. 16, states that many of the churches destroyed by Gijew were restored by Lalibela.

- 5) Bete Denagil
- 6) Bete Golgotha

All these groups are interconnected by subterranean passages or tunnels. If we can rely on the information recorded on the last page of *Gedle Lalibela*⁵² in Bete Gebriel, these churches can also be listed in chronological order:

1) Bete Mariam	inaugurated	on 21st Meskerem
2) Bete Meskal	"	on 4th Yekatit
3) Bete Medhane Alem	"	on 13th Nehase
4) Bete Ammanuel	"	on 28th Tahsas
5) Bete Giorgis	"	on 6th Hidar
6) Bete Golgotha	"	on 20th Miazia
7) Bete Gebriel	"	on 19th Tahsas
8) Bete Libanos	"	on 3rd Tir
9) Bete Denagil	"	on 1st Nehase
10) Bete Merqorewos	"	on 25th Hidar

It is stated in the same source that Lalibela began the construction in the tenth year of his reign and that it took twenty-three years to complete the churches.

There are three types of monolithic churches in Ethiopia: 1) cave churches; 2) semi-hewn churches; 3) monolithic churches.⁵³ The cave was changed into a church having some decoration inside while the second type included detailed interior decoration intended to represent a complete church and partial decoration, at least on one external facade, without the whole being separated from the main rock. The third type of church was completely separated from the surrounding rock and was hewn on all sides including the roof. The techniques involved in the construction of such churches were practised in Ethiopia long before Lalibela's reign and representative examples can be found in many areas.⁵⁴ All three types, however, are found at Roha where they were hewn out of red volcanic rock.

Why did Lalibela construct so many churches of varied size and type in the one place? A possible answer can be found in his *Gedle* (life story). There it is recounted that he ascended to heaven and saw marvellous buildings. God then ordered him to build similar churches in a place which He himself indicated.⁵⁵ Elsewhere it is said that Lalibela visited Jerusalem and was inspired to build similar churches in Ethiopia.⁵⁶ He knew the intense desire of all Christian Ethiopians to visit the Holy Land at least once during their lifetime. As the ultimate object of this pilgrimage was to secure eternal life in the heavenly Jerusalem, Lalibela designed these churches to symbolize both the heavenly and the earthly. Heaven is represented by the second group of churches: Bete Gebriel symbolizes the road to heaven; Bete Libanos - Cherubim which support the throne of God; Bete Merqorewos - hell and purgatory, while paradise is represented by Bete Ammanuel - the heavenly Jerusalem. The first group of churches are concerned with the earthly Jerusalem. Bete Mariam symbolizes Gethsemany; Bete Medhane Alem - the tent of the Ark; Bete Golgotha-the Holy Sepulchre;

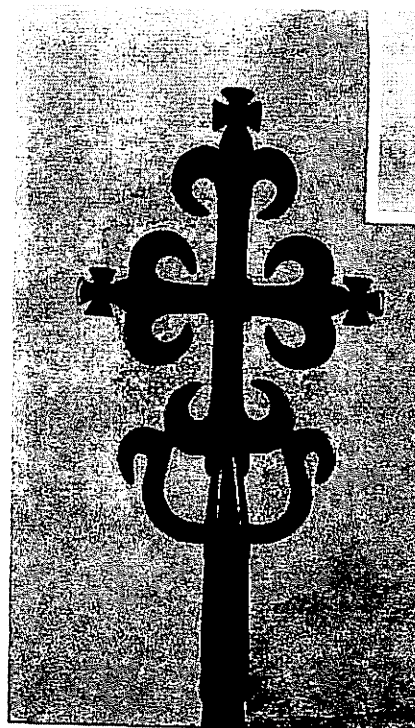
52. "We recorded this document from the inscription engraved in Bete Mariam by the old generation" is stated at the beginning of the text.

53. R. Sauter, "Où en est notre connaissance des églises rupestres d'Éthiopie": *AE* 5 (1963), pp. 235-280.

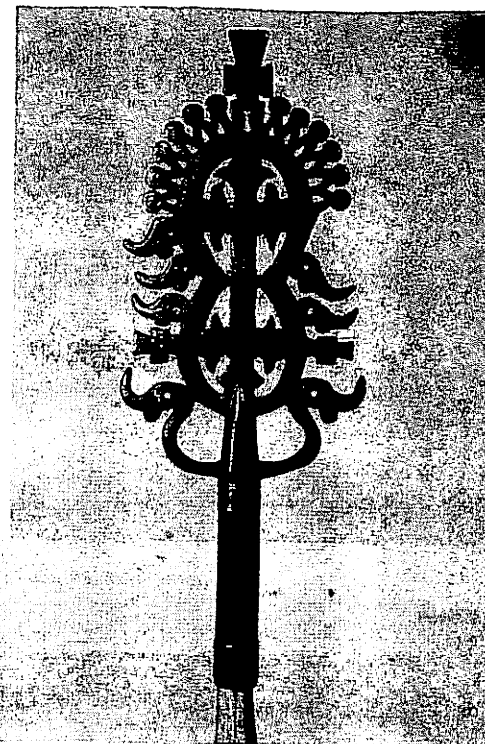
54. Tewelde Medhin Joseph, "Introduction générale aux églises monolithes du Tigré": *PICES* I (Addis Ababa, 1966), pp. 83-98; G. Gerster, *Churches in Rock*, (London, 1970); D. Buxton, *The Rock-hewn and other Medieval Churches in Tigré Province Ethiopia*, (Oxford, 1971); I. Pearce, "Pearce's Pilgrimage to the Rock-hewn Churches of Tigré": *Ethiopia Observer*, Vol. XI, No. 2 (1967), pp. 77-120; D. Otto "The Rock-hewn Churches of Tigré," *ibid.*, pp. 121-151.

55. J. Perruchon, *Vie de Lalibela, roi d'Éthiopie*, p. 56 ff., (text).

56. *Ibid.*, p. 104. (text).



Typical crosses of the Zagwe Period.



and Bete Denagil - the Christian virtues of faith and love. Place names in the area also relate to the Holy Land. Northwest of Golgotha is a cross hewn from solid rock called Qeranio. The place beneath it is called the Tomb of Adam.⁵⁷ A little further down where once seven olive trees existed⁵⁸ the area is called ቅዱስ ፍትሕ - the court of judgement which symbolizes the court where the decision to crucify Christ was made. The hill above the present Seven Olives Hotel is called Debre Zeit - the Mount of Olives, representing the place where Christ was captured. His first appearance after the Resurrection is recalled in the area named Bethania. Originally the place where the rock-hewn churches are found was known as Werwer. It was probably changed to Roha after Al-Rôha, the Arabic name for the Syrian city of Edessa⁵⁹, during the early period of their construction.

A stream which flows from northeast to southwest is called Jordan. In Christian tradition, the River Jordan plays a most important part in the act of seeking salvation. The pilgrim should drink from it and be baptised in it. Thus he secures salvation for his soul and ensures that his body will remain intact after death. The source of the Ethiopian River Jordan is on Debre Zeit, a hill east of Roha. At its source, the river branches, one stream called the Yor flowing down the north-eastern side and the other, the Danos, flowing south-westerly. A third stream, the Henon, flows between these two. Farther west, where all three join, the river is called Jordanos. At their meeting point the lake formed is known as Yohannes Amba after John the Baptist. The lake symbolizes the place where Christ was baptised by John and at Epiphany all the churches of Roha gather there to celebrate the event.

The construction of these churches represented an attempt by Lalibela to discourage pilgrims from journeying to Jerusalem. Many Christians left Ethiopia but few reached their objective. The dangers they encountered in the deserts of the Sudan and Egypt or in passing through Muslim countries on their way to the Holy Land were not unknown to Lalibela. Roha then was to be a substitute for Jerusalem, a place of safety for pilgrims. It would appear that his plan met with some success. Alvares, a sixteenth century visitor to Roha observed that there was much pilgrimage⁶⁰ and even today it is an important place for Ethiopian Christians. On Christmas day, which is also the birthday of Lalibela, pilgrims seeking salvation flock there from every corner of the country, but in particular from Gojjam, Begemidir and Tigré.

Opinions differ as to who built these churches. The *Gedle* of Lalibela states that they were built by Lalibela himself. "Angels joined the workmen and toiled with them by day, and in the night they did double the amount of work which the men had done during the day."⁶¹ Oral tradition in Ethiopia, however, attributes the work to the Copts.⁶² At that period, Christians in Egypt were being subjected to persecution and many were forced to flee the country. Consequently, between 4,000 and 5,000 came to Ethiopia. Among these were the men who worked on the construction of the monolithic churches of Roha. The clergy at Roha substantiated this view when they informed Alvares "that all the work on these churches was done in twenty-four years, and that this is written, and that they were made by Gibetas [Egyptians]; that is, white men, for they well know that they do not know

57. According to Christian tradition Christ was crucified in the place where the cranium of Adam had been found, hence the name ቅዱስ ፍትሕ.

58. A few may be found there today.

59. Tabari, *Chronique*, trans. Zotenberg, (Paris, 1958), Vol. III, p. 406. Cf. O. G.S. Crawford, *Ethiopia Itineraries circa 1400-1524*, (C.U.P. Hakluyt Society, London 1958), p. 89.

60. F. Alvares, *The Prester John of the Indies*, Vol. I, p. 207.

61. W. Budge, *A History of Ethiopia*, (London, 1928), Vol. I, p. 282.

62. H. Dabbert, *Die monolithenen Kirchen Lalibelas in Aethiopien*, (Berlin, 1938), p. 18.

how to do any well-executed work.”⁶³ As mentioned previously, monolithic churches existed in many areas before Lalibela’s reign, particularly in northern Ethiopia. ⁶⁴ Therefore, it does not seem probable that the Emperors employed foreigners to construct these churches. Moreover, in his book *Islam in Ethiopia*, Trimmingham notes that “worship in caves was an Agao practice. Besides the ten churches at Lalibela (Roha) there are some 200 other Monolithic churches in the same region.” ⁶⁵ A comparison of their structure with that of the Aksumite buildings indicates that generally the art and architectural styles were inherited from Aksum, although some change and modification had taken place. The Ge’ez script which we find in some of these churches supports this idea but, on the other hand, we must not forget the contribution of foreigners to the then existing style, a contribution which is visible in some churches. C. Conti Rossini, for instance, believes that Arab and Byzantine elements are present in these churches. ⁶⁶ However, in the main, the eleven monolithic churches of Roha are a continuation and development of Aksumite art and architecture, which of course does not exclude the possibility of foreign influence.

5) A Short Description of Each Church

The following brief description of each church is intended to provide a better understanding of the artistic value of these churches.

a) **Bete Medhane Alem** is a rectangular church which measures 33.5 X 23.5 metres: it is 11 metres in height and the maximum thickness of the walls is 2.0 metres. It is the largest of all the churches and has a courtyard which is 40 X 38 metres. Externally it is supported by 32 square columns while inside there are only 28, these forming five aisles. There are three doors in the north, south and west sides respectively. There are also two rows of windows: those of the lower row being shaped like a cross with four apertures, the upper having ten small circular openings which, in the past, were covered with coloured glass. The inside facade is not elaborately decorated. In the northern part of the church is found the tomb of Sidi Meskal together with his two companions. ⁶⁷ Apparently they were the architects who guided the work of construction.

b) **Bete Mariam** is also a rectangular church. Externally it measures 15 X 11 metres and is 10 metres high. Its three doors face north, south and west and inside there are three aisles and five transepts or cross-bays. This church is the most highly decorated as the arches and pillars display sculptures and, in some cases, paintings. ⁶⁸ One third of the upper wall and ceiling is also covered with paintings which represent the main events of Christ’s life on earth such as the Annunciation, the flight, the performance of miracles, the Transfiguration and so on. Above each painting there is a legend in Ge’ez to explain the context. The letters are all vocalized and large in size. No doubt they are among the earliest writings but it is difficult to establish their exact date. As in the older churches such as Debre Damo, other decoration includes animal figures. Bulls, peacocks and fighting animals are among those depicted. On the west wall, there is a relief of St. George killing the dragon.

63. Alvares, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 227.

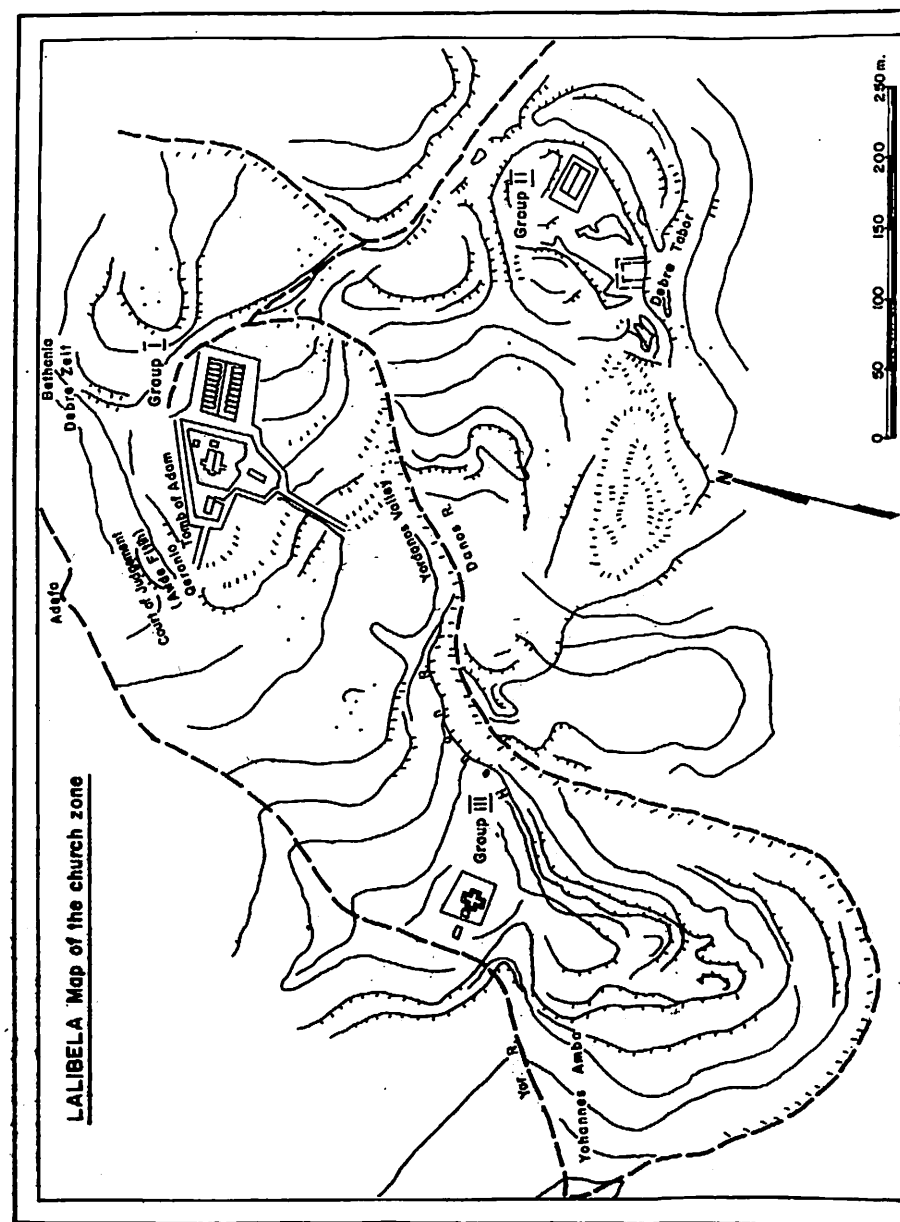
64. See above, p. 272 n. 54.

65. J. S. Trimmingham, *op.cit.*, p. 56 n. 5.

66. C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d’Etiopia*, (Bergamo, 1928), p. 315; H. Dabbert, *op.cit.*, p. 52 believes that the swastika design visible in Bete Mariam originated in Egypt.

67. H. Debbert, *op.cit.*, p. 67.

68. About these we have the following details: “In the Church of Biet Maryam at Lalibela, referred to earlier for the bas-reliefs on its facade, a frieze above the pilasters of the north aisle depicts a fight between cattle and behind them birds may be faintly discerned. This is the realm of pure decoration. But all around the central nave a series of scenes ... provides absolutely irrefutable evidence of the existence of figurative iconography based on the Gospel.” (J. Leroy, *Ethiopian Painting*, (London, 1967) p. 16).



c) **Bete Meskal** is a cave church which measures 14 X 7 metres. It has two doors and two windows and is almost the extension of the courtyard of Bete Mariam. It has no decoration.

d) **Bete Denagil** is a semi-hewn church which measures 5 X 5 metres. Inside it has three baptistries, one square and the others in the form of a Greek cross.

e) **Bete Golgotha** and **Bete Michael** are both semi-hewn churches separated by a wall. The north belongs to Golgotha and the south to Michael. Both parts measure 3 X 3 metres. Each of these churches is supported by five pillars, two on each side and one in the middle. There are carved images representing Yohannes, Giorgis, Qirqos and Estefano with their names cut into the arch.

At present some of these figures are no longer in good shape. They have deteriorated due to human or natural damage. But the important point here is that the usage of statues in the church is not at all a practice of the Ethiopian church nor of the Orient in general. It is reminiscent of the western practice. If we study, however, the art employed on these statues we realize that it is Oriental. Though the origin of it is not so clear, the existence of such unique art is an important event in the history of art of Ethiopia.

In the southern corner of the same church is found the tomb of Lalibela which is decorated with an iron cross and a crucifix engraved on the stone. One can note special art in the execution of both the cross and the engraved crucifix. Generally speaking all the objects which are found in the church of Golgotha offer a special field of study as far as the development of art in Ethiopia in the Middle Ages is concerned.

g) **Bete Ammanuel** is another rectangular church which measures 17.5 X 11.5 metres and is 11 metres in height. It has one door and four windows. Originally a three-store building, the ground floor is cross-shaped, the first floor is arched over and the second is square-headed. The external facade of the church illustrates the Aksumite style of interchanging recessed and projecting stonework. The exterior is also decorated while the interior is divided into three aisles each with a vaulted roof.

h) **Bete Merqorewos** is a semi-hewn church which measures 31.25 X 7.8 metres. Originally there were twenty irregularly-shaped pillars but today only eighteen still exist. The interior walls are decorated with paintings of the Saints such as St. George, St. Mercurius and the Virgin and Child.⁶⁹

i) **Bete Libanos** is a rectangular church which measures 9 X 7 metres. All four sides have been separated from the surrounding rock and only the roof remains attached to a part still of the original rock. The three rows of windows reveal both Arabic and Aksumite influence. They are square at the bottom, oval in the middle and square-headed at the top, with "monkeys' heads" at the corners.

j) **Bete Gabriel** measures 19.5 X 17.5 metres. It has four doors: two on the south side and two on the north. Some believe that originally this was not a church but a treasury and indeed a considerable amount of treasure has been found there.

k) **Bete Giorgis** is built in the shape of a Greek cross. It measures 22 X 12 metres and is isolated from the other churches. Architecturally, its style is finer than the others as most probably it was built after the architects had gained some experience. Its flat roof is ornamented with crosses and sculptures in relief. The walls reflect the Aksumite style of recessed and projecting stonework. There is also evidence of some foreign influence. Inside there

⁶⁹. This is found today in the National Museum of Addis Ababa.

are four high-relief pillars which were well-planned and executed. The dome is not in the centre of the church but is located above the altar in the eastern arm of the cross.⁷⁰

Although there is some disagreement on the matter, the approximate period during which these churches were constructed was during the reign of Lalibela. He employed both skilled and unskilled workers and undoubtedly spent a large sum of money on this project. As the work was nearing its completion there was an economic crisis. According to the *Gedle Lalibela*, he had bought the land on which the churches were constructed and further, he had paid each worker whatever sum he had asked.⁷¹ It is said that the economic crisis was greatly exaggerated although Emperor Lalibela is reported to have distributed all his personal property, even his shoes, and also to have sold his son as a slave to some merchants in order to give alms to the poor. The crisis was perhaps as much due to his devotion to the work of building the churches, a result of which was that discipline within the administration was relaxed and local governors slipped from his control. According to his *Gedle*, Lalibela sent his son to suppress a rebellion led by one of the governors.⁷² The loss of central control provided an opportunity for the supporters of the old dynasty to reorganize in a bid to gain power. However, Lalibela was an imposing figure and his prestige prevented their success.

5. The Significance of the Rock-hewn Churches

a) **Religion:** The churches were a source of inspiration and hope for Ethiopian Christians as they were considered comparable in significance to those in Jerusalem. It is stated in the *Gedle Lalibela* that for anyone who visits these churches it is as if he has seen the face of Jesus Christ.⁷³ *Zena Lalibela* offers a different view of their significance. ለዛቲ መካን ወባረከዋ ሊት እን ወይዘላ ረሰይከዋ ትኩን መካን ቅድስት ከመ ደብረ ታቦር መካን ምሥጢርየ ወቀራንዮ መካን ስቅለትየ ወከመ ኢየሩሳሌም ሀገረ እምየ ወመካን ሥጋየ ዘነሃእኩ እምሥጋ ዚእነንጹሕ ወለ እመ ነበረ ውስቱታ ብእሲ ወለእመ ነገድ ገብሃ ይኩን ከመ ዘነግደ ገብ መቃብርየ ኢየሩሳሌም ወለእመ ተመ ጠወ ሥጋየ ወደምየ ውስት እማንቶን አብያተ ክርስቲያናት ይሠረይ ዙሎ ጋጠአቱ⁷⁴ "I blessed this place and from now onwards let it be a holy place as Mount Tabor, the place of my transfiguration, as Golgotha, the place of my crucifixion, and as Jerusalem the land of my mother and where I took flesh from her pure flesh. If a man abides in it, or undertakes pilgrimage to it, it is as equal as if he went to my Sepulchre in Jerusalem. And if somebody receives my flesh and blood in those churches he will be redeemed of all his sins." For this reason many

70. There is a considerable amount of literature on the monolithic churches of Lasta. The following are the principal works in chronological order: F. Alvares, *The Prester John of the Indies*, op.cit., Vol. I, pp. 199-228. It is the earliest description of these churches, written at the beginning of the sixteenth century. M. de Castanhoso, *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia in 1541-1543*, trans. R.S. Whiteway, (Hakluyt Society, London, 1902), pp. 95-97; M.G. Rohlf, "Die christlichen Wunderbauten zu Lalibela in Abyssinien," *Globus*, 14 (1868), pp. 364-370; Idem, *Land und Volk in Afrika*, (Bremen, 1870); A. Raffray, *L'Éthiopie ses mœurs, ses traditions, le Negousse Johannes, les Églises monolithes de Lalibela*, (Paris, 1885); A.A. Monti della Corte, *Lalibela, Le chiese ipogee e monolitiche e gli altri monumenti medievali del Lasta*, (Roma, 1940); L. Findlay, *The Monolithic Churches of Lalibela in Ethiopia*, (Cairo, 1944); D. Buxton, *The Christian Antiquities*, (Oxford, 1947); B. Playne, *Saint George for Ethiopia* (London, 1954); S. Wright, "Notes on Some Cave Churches in the Province of Wallo," *AE* 2 (1957), pp. 7-13; I. Bidder, *Lalibela, the Monolithic Churches of Ethiopia*, (New York, 1959); A. Miquel, "Reconnaissance dans la Lasta," *AE*, 3 (1959), pp. 132-155; L. Bianchi Barriviera, "Le chiese in roccia di Lalibela e di altri luoghi del Lasta," *RSE*, 18 (1962), pp. 5-76; *Ibid.*, 19 (1963), pp. 5-176; R. Sauter, "Où en est notre connaissance des églises rupestres d'Éthiopie," *AE* 5 (1963), pp. 235-251.

71. J. Perruchon, *Vie de Lalibela, roi d'Éthiopie*, p. 57.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

74. *Zena Lalibela*, p. 127.

people from different directions undertook the pilgrimage to Roha and still do particularly on Christmas Day. There is also a widespread belief that a Christian having been there gain eternal life in the next world.⁷⁵

b) **Architecture:** The churches of Lalibela, as they are called today, are unique in a number of ways. First, there are so many all built from the same rock mass. Secondly, the dimension and style of each church differs, thus underlining the ingenuity and range of abilities of those responsible. Moreover, the mere execution of such work from one mass of solid rock with such exactitude and symmetry is truly a human miracle. Alvares recognized this when he remarked: "...the like of which and so many, cannot, as it appears to me, be found in the world."⁷⁶ These churches are certainly unique and, it is claimed, rank as the eighth wonder of the world: "Mirabili, uniche al mondo".⁷⁷

c) **Art:** The bas-relief figures, the interior decorations, the walls, the pillars, the variety of window shapes and the general appearance of the exterior are both a source of inspiration to artists and a source of admiration to visitors. They conquer even the most barbaric heart. Ahmed Gragn, a fanatical opponent of Christianity and Christian monuments, yielded to these magnificent churches and withdrew his army without damaging them. They are, in fact, one of the few monuments which escaped destruction at his hand. They are a memorial to the level of civilization reached during the period of the Zagwe dynasty.

d) **Economic Significance:** For Ethiopia, these churches were, and still are, of economic importance. Today, although accommodation and communication facilities still could be improved, Roha is one of the most popular tourist attractions in the country.

e) **Restoration:** Although work has begun on their restoration, heavy rains and continuous erosion have taken their toll of these architectural masterpieces. Because the roof of Bet Medhane Alem had been damaged it was necessary to cover it with corrugated iron. The same fate befell Bete Ammanuel, not long ago it was covered with cement and metal sheets. Bete Merqorewos is also in need of repair, likewise Bete Libanos. Since 1966 restoration work has proceeded with the aid of a joint fund subscribed to by the Government and the International Fund for Monuments of New York. As a result of this restoration the metal sheets have been removed and the natural appearance of the churches restored.

The achievement of this gigantic work prompted Emperor Lalibela to instruct local governors to undertake similar projects in their regions. It is probable that many other churches were built throughout Ethiopia at that time. Oral tradition attributes the construction of at least two churches to this period: one, the monolithic church of Yeka Michale found to the northeast of Addis Ababa and the other, Adadi Mariam near the Awash River about 50 kilometres south of Addis Ababa. Abba Gebre Menfes Qidus who had come from Egypt established his monastery on Ziqualla, a mountain about 50 kilometres south of Addis Ababa, during Lalibela's reign. In some chronicles he is described as having played a leading role along with Tekle Haimanot, Yesus Mo'a and Yohannie in bringing about the

75. This was confirmed by European travellers in the sixteenth century: O.G.S. Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400-1524*, p. 153; F. Alvares says "All the pilgrims [who come here in infinite numbers for devotion] put their hands in the stone", op.cit., Vol. I, p. 207. Among the pilgrims who used to attend regularly was the class of *Amina*, the troubadours of Ethiopia. Probably because of this the people of this class earned a nickname *Lalibela*. The inhabitants of Shewa in particular use this term for Aminu (Berhanu Abebe, tackled this problem in his recent article: "Hamina, Distiques amhariques d'après un transcription d'Antoine d'Abbadie": *AE* 8 (1971), pp. 89-101).

76. Alvares, op.cit., Vol I, p. 205.

77. C. Conti Rossini, *Storia*, p. 315.

78. The whole episode is described by Chihab ed-Din, *Histoire de la conquête de l'Abyssinie*, trans. R. Basset, Paris, 1897-1901, pp. 409-413. See English version, S. Pankhurst, *Ethiopia: A Cultural History*, (London, 1956), pp. 155-156.

restoration of the Solomonic dynasty.⁷⁹ If the information about the construction of the two churches is accurate then we have a fairly clear indication of the extent of the Christian faith at that time.

Although architectural techniques had reached a high point, the ruins of the palace of Lalibela have still not been found. As we previously pointed out, however, the churches listed in the second group may have been public buildings rather than places of worship as, unlike all churches in Ethiopia, none of them is oriented towards the east. Perhaps among these was the palace of the Emperor.

7. Literature.

The development of art and architecture implies, in some ways, the existence of literature. There are no inscriptions in the churches of Lalibela.⁸⁰ Nor have any been found during recent restoration and partial excavation in the areas surrounding the churches. In Bete Golgotha there are bas-relief statues of different saints and above each is engraved the name: ቂርቆስ Cyriacus; - ጊዮርጊስ George; - ዮሐንስ John; - እስጢፋኖስ Stephen; - ገብረ ክርስቶስ Gebre Kristos. They are written in vocalized characters. In Bete Gebriel, Bete Golgotha, Bete Medhane Alem and Bete Giorgis there are small rectangular tables with drawers decorated and sometimes covered with dedicatory vocalized Ge'ez inscriptions of Lalibela. The content of these inscriptions which I have seen, is that of the tabot dedicated by Lalibela beseeching rest for his soul in the other world. There is no doubt that these inscriptions have literary significance: historically, they leave a question mark. Explanatory inscriptions for the paintings of human and animal figures which decorate the ceiling and the walls can be found in the church of Bete Mariam. Although O. Jäger believes that these paintings belonged to the fourteenth or fifteenth century,⁸¹ the evidence suggests that the period of the Zagwé dynasty was not a sterile age as far as literature was concerned. Other sources such as the dedicatory writing of Lalibela in the Golden Gospel of the Monastery of Abba Libanos of Ham,⁸² some Christian and non-Christian literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries⁸³ and above all, the letters of the Zagwé Emperors addressed to the Caliphs of Egypt and the Patriarchs of Alexandria which unfortunately are no longer in their original form, all suggest the production of a large number of literary works.

Furthermore, Ethiopian tradition attributes the birth of the Amharic language to the period of Zagwé rule. Obviously the language originated at a much earlier date among the Amhara people of central Ethiopia but during the Zagwé period it seems to have acquired wider importance and was spoken at the imperial court. This explains why it was known in the beginning as *Lisane Negus* - the language of the Emperor. At that time the Amhara⁸⁴ people were politically very active and, as mentioned previously, occupied key administrative

79. Tekle Yesus, *Chronicle of Ethiopia*, p. 17.

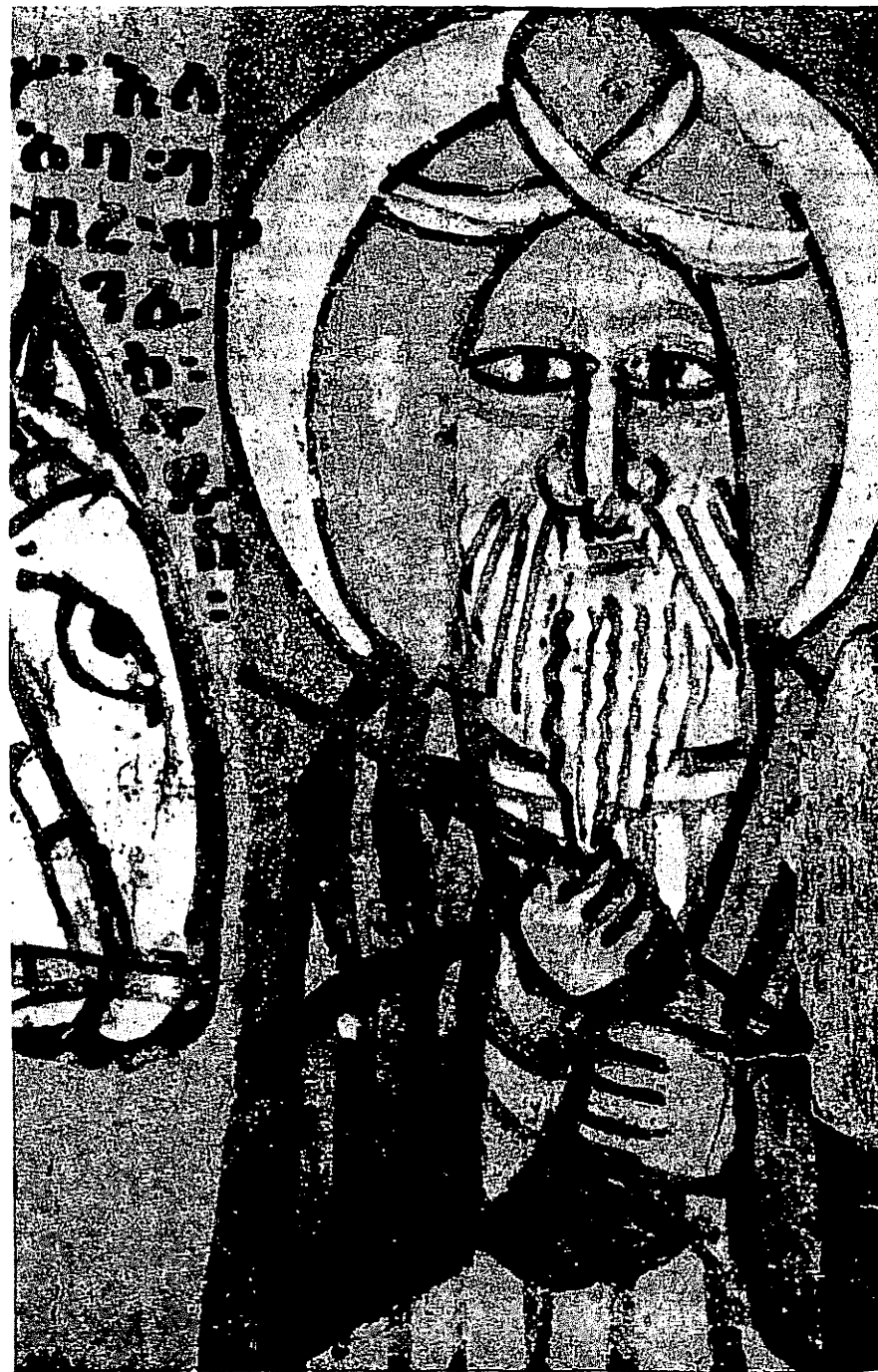
80. In the middle of the church of Bete Mariam is a pillar completely covered with a cloth. It is suspected that underneath there is an inscription. In 1966, for a short time it was uncovered and all four sides were photographed. In spite of my efforts to see the photographs, I was rather unfortunate to secure permission to consult them.

81. O. Jäger, *Antiquities of North Ethiopia*, (Stuttgart, 1965), p. 107.

82. C. Conti Rossini, "L'evangelo d'oro di Dabra Libanos," pp. 184-190.

83. J. Doresse, "Littérature éthiopienne et littérature occidentale au Moyen-Age": *BSAC* 16 (1961-1962), p. 142; E. Cerulli, *Storia della letteratura etiopica*, (Milano, 1956), p. 82 ff.

84. This is alluded to in the *Chronicle of Harar*: E. Cerulli, "Il Sultanato dello Scioa nel secolo XIII, secondo un nuovo documento storico": *RSE* 1 (1941), p. 10 (trans.); and in the chronicles of "Mamluk's Sultans of Egypt," *Pat. Or.*, Vol. XIV, p. 485; *Ibid.*, Vol. XX, p. 56.



Abuna Gebre Menfes Qidus

Courtesy of Prof. J. Ch

According to the list of Emperors of the Zagwé dynasty, Lalibela ruled for forty consecutive years. He died on the 12th of *Sené* (22nd of June)⁸⁸ and his grave is to be found in the church of Golgotha.⁸⁹ Although none of the monolithic churches at Roha is dedicated to him he is one of the prominent saints of the Ethiopian Church. The reason for his canonization is alluded to in the last pages of his *Ge'dle*.⁹⁰ He never used the state treasury for his private gain and taxes collected from the people were used exclusively for public works. Indeed he preferred to live on the money he earned from handwork which he made and sold, disguising himself as a peasant. Such was his simplicity, that one day after giving a big luncheon, he changed from his royal vestments and, putting on simple clothes, went to work. A contemporary poet who understood Lalibela's intentions composed the following Ge'ez verse:

ወንጉሥስ ምስሉ ነዳጅን ከመ ጽኑስ and the King with a poor as a needy one".⁹¹

a) Decline

85. For details see W. Leslau, "The Influence of Cushitic on the Semitic Languages of Ethiopia a Problem of Substratum": *Word* 1 (1945), pp. 59-82; E. Ullendorff, *The Semitic Languages of Ethiopia*, (London 1955), pp. 66 ff. 129 ff.

87. W. Leslau, "The Meaning of ARAB in Ethiopia," *Muslim World* 39 (1949), pp. 307-308.

88. W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, Vol. IV, pp. 995-996.

89. Two churches in Shewa are dedicated to Lalibela - Qoftu Lalibela about 12 kilometres northeast of Debre Zeit and Qetchema Lalibela a few kilometres north of Nazareth. Both churches were founded during the reign of Menelik II in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was done perhaps on historical grounds. Chihab ed-Din speaks about Lalibela which is not far from Ziqualla (*Op. cit.*, pp. 214, 267 and 287).

90. J. Perruchon, *Vie de Lalibela*, p. 63 (text).

91. *Ibid.*, p. 50; cf. Tekle Yesus, *Chronicle of Ethiopia*, p. 16. These two lines differ from qiné verses in that they are spontaneous prose without the characteristics of wax and gold. This is in contrast to the qiné which is attributed to a certain scholar from Aksum, Nablīs, contemporary of Lalibela. (see Yekuno Amlak Gebre Selassie, "Early Ge'ez Qiné", *Jes.* 4, 1 (1966), p. 82.)

92. C. Conti Rossini, "Gli atti di Re Na'akueto La'-ab:" *AIUON*, nuova serie 2, (1943), p. 151.

93. I am grateful to Melake Selam Gebre Hiywet of Shiré who kindly sent his own man to the Monastery of Meskal Kibra in Medebay - Tabir to have the *Gedle* copied for me.

confirm this claim instead it refers to the coronation of Yitbarek while his father was still alive. In fact, Lalibela had anointed Yitbarek (since he was a priest-king this was canonically possible) at an earlier period in his life. Later, when some needy people came a great distance to ask Lalibela for money he gave them Yitbarek as alms "without hesitation" because he had already distributed all his other belongings. What happened to him next can be learned from the brief *Gedle Yitbarek*.⁹⁴ There, it is stated that he was sold as a slave to some merchants who departed for their destination taking him with them. On the way, they were met by Ne'akuto Le'ab who indemnified them and returned with Yitbarek.

Another tradition underlines the fact that, after the death of her husband, Meskal Kibra left Lasta via Selemnt. Crossing the River Tekezzé she came to Shiré and settled in a place called Medebay-Tabir. There she founded a monastery where she spent the remaining seven years of her life.⁹⁵ Local tradition in Tigré claims that her son also left Lasta and became a hermit in the region of Satuwa Gebriel, east of Adua, where he spent the rest of his life. Local people still point out the rock-hewn tomb in the church as being his but no inscription has been found on this site to support the tradition. For reasons stated later, the claim is unacceptable. It is interesting to speculate, however, why mother and son appear to have left in the same direction. Though a definite answer is not yet possible some tentative conclusions may be drawn from existing sources. The economic crisis which had begun during the lifetime of Lalibela provoked rebellion against his wife and his successor. Resenting the situation, the people preferred someone else on the throne. Mother and son having weighed the seriousness of the threat, left the capital city and went north to greater security. Meskal Kibra seems to have been bitterly disappointed, ending her life as a hermit whereas her son was awaiting the right moment to return to Roha, the capital city, and claim his father's throne.⁹⁶

b) Religious Life

Religious life appears to have been neither monolithic nor harmonious as various factions existed which endangered the stability of the Church. It was at this time that the problem of the Sabbath arose. Qewstos, a contemporary and close relative of Tekle Haimanot, proposed that the Sabbath be accorded equal status with Sunday.⁹⁷ Because it was alien to church practice many of the clergy opposed him and it was not until the reign of Zer'a Yacob that the matter was resolved.

c) Military Setback

The military superiority of the Agaw people was also declining. *Gedle Lalibela* mentions a rebellion in an unnamed region. Seeking to restore order, Emperor Lalibela had sent his son to wage war but instead the latter had attempted to negotiate peace in the hope of achieving victory without bloodshed. The rebel leader had refused and war became inevitable.

The following day they met on the battlefield but before the fighting began the rebel

94. A short hand-written account on paper, found in Satuwa Gebriel in Tigré.

95. According to *Zena Lalibela* she remained in this place when her husband left for Jerusalem before his coronation. She built a church there while her husband still was in power. *Zena Lalibela*, op. cit., p. 132. Cf. Perruchon, *Vie de Lalibela*, p. 37 (text).

96. *Zena Lalibela* again underlines the cordial relations existing between the Lalibela family and the ecclesiastics of the North. Zacharias the Nibure Ed of Aksum was the god-father of Yitbarek and when the latter achieved his seventh year, he was sent to Aksum to be educated under his god-father, (p. 147).

97. *Gedle Qewstos*, a manuscript in the National Library, pp. 45 and 49. At the end of the work it is described as having been compiled during the reign of David I (1382 - 1411) by Meb'a Sion, p. 226.

leader proposed that instead of mobilizing their armies they should fight a duel. The son of Lalibela agreed. First the rebel leader threw his spear but missed because of the prayer of his father, Gebre Meskal. In his turn, the son of Lalibela threw his spear piercing the neck of his opponent. The rebel army fled but in the ensuing chase many were killed. The father of the rebel was caught and brought to the court of Lalibela. The Emperor who was merciful set him free and allowed him to return home.⁹⁸

The arch enemy of the Zagwé Emperors was Metelomé, King of Damot who refused to pay tribute. His dominion which he had declared independent extended to the River Jemma, west Shewa, and at times had reached as far as the River Chacha and Wegetchit. ⁹⁹ Shewa region suffered most from periodic raids by this man. The Zagwé Emperors attempted to protect Shewa. Zena Petros,¹⁰⁰ one of the last Kings of their line, undertook an expedition against Metelomé. His army was large and he was accompanied by priests with their Ark (Tabots), but the war was disastrous. It cost Zena Petros his life. He was beheaded and his skull was later used as a measurement for grain.¹⁰¹ Although the result was completely different one thing is true: Zagwé emperors were until that time on the offensive.

9. Ne'akuto Le'ab

After the death of Lalibela, the emperor who ruled with power and confidence was his nephew Ne'akuto Le'ab. He was the last illustrious emperor of the line. For this reason he was considered the fourth great emperor of the dynasty. He was the son of Gebr Mariam and his mother was known as Merkéza. Both his own *Gedle*¹⁰² and the *Gedle Lalibela*¹⁰³ provide us with details about his life. He was brought up and educated in the palace of his uncle, Lalibela. When he was twenty he married the daughter of Isaac, whose name was Ecclesia.¹⁰⁴ During Lalibela's lifetime he rose to a high rank in the army and when Serre Qims, the governor of Gojjam, refused to pay the annual tribute it was he who was sent to bring him to order. When the governor refused a second time, Ne'akuto Le'ab engaged him in battle. Emerging victorious, he took the governor prisoner and brought him to Lasta in chains.¹⁰⁵ In recognition of this victory Lalibela appointed him governor of Lasta. In his capacity as governor he requested some craftsmen from his uncle as he wanted to construct churches in the region. Lalibela gave him three Egyptians - Bekimo, Andrias and Saoul - with whose help the work was completed.

W. Budge¹⁰⁶ informs us that he was sent to Yemen as a special envoy of the emperor and there came under the influence of the Muslims. He adopted such customs as having harem and eating Muslim food. It is also said that he visited the Caliph of Egypt without the approval of Lalibela - an act that was considered represented a submission to Islam. In consequence Lalibela summoned him home to Ethiopia and he left Yemen with great regret. It is not possible, however, to ascertain whether this information is accurate as the author does not mention his source but merely states "according to some".

Certainly Ne'akuto Le'ab possessed all the essential attributes of a king. He was

98. J. Perruchon, op. cit., p., 53.

99. Tekle Giorgis, *Chronicle*, MS., p. 18.

100. According to some sources Zena Petros was the father of Ne'akuto Le'ab. (Tekle Giorgis, *Chronicle*, p. 17).

101. C.Conti Rossini, *Gedle Yared, CSCO, Scriptores Aethiopici*, Vol. 17, (Louvain, 1904), pp. 23 and 26 (text).

102. C.Conti Rossini, *Gli Atti di Re Na'akueto La'-ab* pp. 113-176, (text).

103. J. Perruchon, *Vie de Lalibela, roi d'Éthiopie*, (Paris, 1892), pp. 51-53.

104. C.Conti Rossini, op.cit., p. 138 ff. (text).

105. *Ibid.*, p. 141 ff; *Zena Lalibela*, p. 130.

106. W. Budge, *A History of Ethiopia*, Vol. I, p. 283.

gallant general, a successful diplomat and a pious man who built churches. Such qualities gained him the support of two important elements in society - the army and the clergy. Our knowledge of his achievements after assuming power, however, is very fragmentary and derived largely from secondary sources. *Gedle Qewstos* reveals that he had appointed his own governor, Yohannes, in the region of Shewa. The governor had his seat in Fentalé near Awash and he had built churches and a big palace for himself there. The foundations of the buildings were discovered later.¹⁰⁷ Depending on the list referred to, he ruled for forty or forty-eight years.

During his reign relations with the outside world deteriorated. This was particularly true of Egypt. On the death of Metropolitan Isaac who had arrived during the reign of Lalibela (some less reliable sources claim that he was still alive during the reign of Yekuno Amlak) the Mamluk Sultans refused permission for the ordination of a new Metropolitan. This was the second occasion since the time of Cosmas that the Ethiopian Church had had to function for many years without a Metropolitan.¹⁰⁸ It was a critical period for the Church. Many of the priests and deacons ordained at the time of the previous Metropolitan had died and the rest had become too old to fulfill their duties. The Ethiopian clergy was summoned to a meeting in the capital of the Emperor to discuss ways and means of alleviating the crisis. After a thorough examination of the problem, they decided to appoint a temporary Ethiopian bishop until such times as it was possible to secure another from the See of Alexandria.¹⁰⁹ This act itself was illegal, because according to canon law a bishop can only be ordained by bishops who themselves have Apostolic Succession. But necessity obliged the Ethiopian clergy to ignore the law. They elected Tekle Haimanot as temporary bishop of Ethiopia and he began to ordain other priests and deacons.

Tekle Haimanot¹¹⁰ was born in the place which is now called Itissa, Bulga just a few kms. from Addis Ababa.¹¹¹ His father was Segazab and his mother Egziharya. During his childhood he was engaged in pastoral work but later was summoned by God to become a missionary. His work in pagan areas involved baptising converts while among Christians he sought to consolidate the faith and to teach Christian ethics. For this purpose he travelled widely throughout the country and his prestige grew. His successful missionary activities secured him a title of "New Apostel"¹¹² of Ethiopia while to foreigners he became known as the "Benedict" of Ethiopia.¹¹³ Among Ethiopian churchmen he is unique. He is the only Ethiopian to be canonized by the Coptic Church. In the Alexandrian Calendar both his birthday - 1st January - and the commemoration of his death - 25th August - are mentioned.¹¹⁴ When he occupied the Archbishopric throne he became involved in the political life of the country. Like all priests, Tekle Haimanot favoured the Solomonic dynasty and he may

107. *Zena Lalibela*, p. 193.

108. In *Gedle Tekle Haimanot* we find that Metropolitan Gerilos was still active during the early life of Tekle Haimanot, (p. 75 Addis Ababa's edition). This information is repeated in *Gedle Qewstos* (op. cit., pp. 29 and 164). But in addition to that the author of this work mentions Metropolitan Yohannes who was residing in Aksum (pp. 132 and 194).

109. Heruy Welde Selassie, *Wazema*, (Addis Ababa, 1929), p. 81.

110. His first name was Fesseha Sion. W. Budge, *The Life of Takla Haymanot*, p. 42.

111. The exact date of his birth is not known. In *Gedle Qewstos* (p. 198) it is mentioned that when the change of the dynasty took place (1270) he was 80 years old. If we assume this information as correct, then he must have been born in 1190.

112. *Gedle Tekle Haimanot*, (Addis Ababa's edition), p. 90.

113. J. S. Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 63.

114. K. Strothmann, *Die Koptische Kirche in der Neuzeit*, (Tuebingen, 1932), p. 122. According to an Egyptian source quoted by O. Meinardus, the birthday of Tekle Haimanot was the 2nd January and he died on the 30th August which more or less coincides with the Ethiopian calendar. ("A Comparative Study on the Sources of the Synaxarium of the Coptic Church": *BSAC* 17 (1963-1964), pp. 128 and 152).

have been instrumental in achieving its ultimate restoration. Certainly during his lifetime the Church assumed a more important and influential role in society. It is even said that the change of dynasty from Zagwé to Solomonic resulted from his intervention and that of another ecclesiastic, Yesus Mo'a, Abbot of the famous monastery of St. Stephen at Haik

Yesus Mo'a (1206-1282)¹¹⁵ was born in Dahna in the province of Begemidir. His father was Zekristos and his mother Egzikibra. He received his early education near his home but later went to Debre Damo, the centre of monastic life where he became a monk. Beside his good educational background, his behaviour was impeccable and for these reasons he succeeded in becoming the Dean of Haik - a position of considerable influence with the Zagwé Emperors. During the reign of Lalibela, the monks of Haik elected him abbot of their monastery. They then sought the Emperor's approval and he agreed with their choice.

Tekle Haimanot and Yesus Mo'a were the two architects of the restoration of the Solomonic line. Their conviction of the superiority of this dynasty was not only ideological but also economic. These of the Solomonic line were well-prepared and knew how to persuade by offering tempting proposals. Since Tekle Haimanot was only a temporary bishop, they planned to offer him one-third of the land of Ethiopia while for Yesus Mo'a, a man of influence with the Zagwé Emperors, they proposed a similar but still more important position, that of Aqabe Se'at who was in actual fact responsible for affairs of state whether internal or external. Apart from their convictions about the Solomonic dynasty, there was also a strong sentimental bond between these two ecclesiastics and Yekuno Amlak, the first emperor of the restored line. Tekle Haimanot was a close relative of Yekuno Amlak and desired to see him on the throne. In consequence, he used his personal prestige and influence to assist in the restoration of the old dynasty. Yekuno Amlak also had some past connection with Yesus Mo'a. He had been in Haik under the supervision of Yesus Mo'a who had been agreeably impressed by his pupil.¹¹⁶ Thus both men had reason to assist Yekuno Amlak in his efforts to re-establish the dynasty. But the restoration still was not in sight. Some Zagwé emperor would continue to rule under unfavourable conditions, at least for a few years more.

10. The Fall of the Zagwé Dynasty

The last emperor of the Zagwé dynasty was Yitbarek. He came to the throne at the crucial time when his opponent, Yekuno Amlak was ready to seize power and restore the old dynasty. There are two different interpretations of how the restoration was achieved. One emphasizes the use of force¹¹⁷ while the other implies that it was accomplished peacefully through the intervention of the Church and by negotiation.

1) Yekuno Amlak, after carefully organizing his forces in Shewa, attempted to engage Yitbarek in battle. The latter resisted for a time but was not in a position to withstand such an army and finally fled from Lasta to the province of Begemidir. Not satisfied with his victory, Yekuno Amlak pursued his enemy until he fell. It is further claimed that Yitbarek asked for asylum in the church of Qirqos in Gaynt and that Yekuno Amlak mercilessly

115. S. Kur, *Actes de Iyasus Mo'a, CSCO. Scriptorum Aethiopicarum*, Vol. 49, (Louvain, 1965), p. 6 ff. (text).

116. S. Kur, op. cit., p. 25. Cf. C. Conti Rossini, "La caduta della dinastia Zagwé e la versione Amharica del Be'ela Nagast": *RRAL*, serie 5, Vol. XXXI (1922), pp. 282 ff.

117. C. Conti Rossini, "La caduta", p. 287. The Amharic version of Be'ela Negest agrees completely with the above text: (C. Conti Rossini, op. cit., p. 304).

murdered him in front of the altar then proclaimed himself emperor of Ethiopia.¹¹⁸

According to local tradition, the decisive battle took place in Daga Qirqos in Gaynt, Begemidir. East of the church are two tombs which are shown to visitors by the priests. One of these is said to be that of Yitbarek and the other that of Christodoulos the Metropolitan of Ethiopia at that time who was killed with Yitbarek on the spot. An octagonal stele is found in the middle of each tomb.

Ne'akuto Le'ab died a natural death and most probably he was succeeded by Emperor Emnet.¹¹⁹ His reign seems to have been the most critical one. Religious controversies and civil wars plagued the country. In *Gedle Qewstos* there is a reference to this emperor, Emnet, who had accepted the Roman Catholic faith as formulated by Pope Leo I.¹²⁰ Theoretically, this is quite possible when one recalls the Syrian Metropolitan¹²¹ sent by the Patriarch of Antioch who also professed the Roman Catholic faith. However, further examination of the text reveals that the assertion was false.

At that time there were two religious factions in the country: one group supported the observation of two Sabbaths (Saturday and Sunday) whereas the second group adhered to one Sabbath, Sunday. The champion of the former group was a certain Hiywet Bine Besion, a Shewan scholar who had been in close contact with the monks of the north. In fact he had received his education in the famous centres of learning of that region, Aksum and Medera, the monastery of *Abba* Gerima, near Adua. The controversy between the two groups had become more and more bitter and the intervention of the emperor became necessary. He summoned a council to settle the problem under his chairmanship. Each group began to reiterate its arguments. Those who believed in one Sabbath based their argument on the New Testament, particularly Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."¹²² Since Paul was against Jewish practices they refused to observe the Jewish Sabbath. The arguments of Hiywet Bine Besion and his associates on the other hand were based on the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament¹²³. The emperor after he had listened carefully to both sides decided in favour of the observation of one Sabbath. This is why he was accused by the defeated group of being a Catholic.

Nor was the political situation at all calm. Metelomé, the ruler of Damot, continued to harass the Shewan territory. Silalish, the south-western part of the present Bulga, was the most vulnerable target of the invasion. Metelomé was not satisfied with the massacre and booty so he also imposed very heavy indemnities which were humiliating and undermined human dignity.¹²⁴ Metelomé extended his occupation to the other parts of Shewa.

118. C. Conti Rossini *op.cit.*, pp. 282 - 286 (text).

119. አመ መንግሥተ (sic) ዘጌ (sic) በእምነት (A. Dillmann, *Chrestomathia Aethiopica*, (Leipzig, 1950, p. 37.

120. እምነት ንጉሥ ዘነግሠ እምነድ ሄሴዳ ዘቤተ ዛጋይ እስመ የአምን በየይማኖተ ሮሜ ዘከመ ደብ ልዮን ዘእውገዝ አብ ጳጥሰቶርስ ሊቀ ጳጳሳት ዘየዕቆባውያን ። (*Gedle Qewstos*, p. 50).

121. E. Quatremère, *Memoires géographiques et historiques sur l'Égypte*, 2 Vols., (Paris, 1811), Vol. II, p. 217.

122. Gal. 6: 15. Circumcision was believed to be part of Christian practice and for this reason the Shewan Christians were accused of betraying this law. ወእንዝ ሀሎ ከመዝ ሐረ ጎበ ጳጳስ አባ ጌርሱስ። ወነገሮ ከመ ወለሉ ሰብአ ሽዋ ሥርዓተ ቤተ ክርስቲያን ወየይማኖተ ሐዋርያት ወከመ ያጠያቂ ሕፃናት እምቅድመ ይግዛፋ ። (*Gedle Tekle Haimanot*, Addis Ababa's edition), p. 75.

123. Gen. 17:10, 21:4, Ex. 16, 23, 20:10.

124. *Gedle Tekle Haimanot*, Addis Ababa's edition, p. 35ff; *Gedle Qewstos*, *op.cit.*, p. 89; A. Dillmann, *Chrestomathia*, pp. 36-39; W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints*, Vol. IV, p. 1241.

He occupied Dawaro, southern Shewa and left ruins behind. The governor of the regi appointed by the Zagwé emperor was dismissed or killed, churches were demolished and t Christian faith was replaced by pagan practices.¹²⁵ Emperor Emnet did not move to ex punishment against Metelomé or to save the region from hardship, not because he did i want to secure his domain from invasion but because he was unable to do so. The Zag dynasty was on the verge of disintegration and the same fate awaited it.

In spite of the military power displayed by Metelomé, however, it was the mission: zeal of Tekle Haimanot which succeeded in gaining the region of Damot for Christiani Metelomé, the once severe persecutor of the Christians now became a Christian himself. This event will have tremendous repercussion: on the developing political situation with the country.

2) The details of these event sare recounted in the *Gedle of Yesus Mo'a*, the summe of it is as follows: It is written that the father of Yekuno Amlak, Tesfa Yesus¹²⁷ was fugitive who had suffered persecution at the hands of the Zawgé Emperor. One day came to the monastery at Haik and implored *Abba* Yesus Mo'a to pray to God to rest him to the throne of his fathers. As a holy man, Yesus Mo'a told him that the thrc would be restored but not during his lifetime. It would be his son who would ultimatt restore the old dynasty.¹²⁸ The father then went to Lasta *incognito* and took employm as a servant of a rich man Killa. There he had intercourse with a maid servant and t her that she would give birth to a very important man. This story was disclosed to t mistress of the house who became interested in the outcome. One day the pregnant m was sent to collect firewood and there in the nearby forest she gave birth to a son. She l him and returned to the house with the firewood. When questioned about her pregnan she gave a negative answer but the mistress sent out a search party to look for the newbc child. After searching for a whole day they found him and brought him back. The ch who grew up in the rich man's house was named Diho (meaning "poor") and his Christi name was Yekuno Amlak.

Soon after, Silwanos, the disciple of Yesus Mo'a, was sent to that region to visi monastery. This man knew the language of the birds and other domestic and wild anim and the Grace of God was upon him. The monk was a guest of the rich man and stayed his house during his visit. That night the monk prayed continuously. A cock-crow revea to him that the man who would eat the cock's head would be crowned Emperor. When heard that, the monk laughed. The rich man asked the reason for his laughter and was t the secret. Early the next morning he caught the cock and gave it to the maid to kill a serve. In preparing the food, the maid thought the head of the cock not fit to serve to a r man so she left it near the fireplace. The small Yekuno Amlak found it there and ate When the food was served the rich man looked in vain for the head of the cock. The m then related how it had been eaten and the rich man, enraged at this, wanted to kill the b His wife prevented him. It was she who looked after the boy and tried to give him a go education by sending him to school with her own child. His teacher was *Abba* Yesus M of Haik. He realized the destiny of this child and treated him very carefully. After he b finished his studies, he returned to the house of the rich man but some townspeople betray his story to the Emperor who ordered his servants to exile the boy to the mountain of Me in Wadla. While there, Yekuno Amlak killed monkeys and made a long strong cord fro

125. *Gedle Qewstos*, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

126. W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints*, Vol. IV, p. 1243.

127. According to *Gedle Qewstos* (*op. cit.*, p. 4) his mother was called Emine Sion, daughter of a no from Wegda, Shewa.

128. S. Kur, *op.cit.*, p. 23. (text).

their tails which he used to escape from the mountain. He returned to Haik where he met Yesus Mo'a and asked him to pray for the restoration of the Solomonic line.

The same legend is also recounted in the *Gedle Tekle Haimanot* but there are slight differences. There is, it narrated, that when Elmeknun was on the throne a cock crowed something very important but no one in his entourage was able to interpret it to him. One day Tekle Haimanot went to Lasta and the Emperor questioned him about the enigma. His interpretation of the cock's crow was that the man who would eat the head of the cock would be the Emperor of Ethiopia and that his dynasty would last forever. He naturally advised the Emperor to kill and eat the bird. On returning to his palace, Elmeknun ordered his maid servant, Delilawit, to kill that particular cock and prepare a meal from it. This she did, preparing and serving the food artfully, but without the head.

At that time there was a man known as Yekuno Amlak who was also in the service of the Emperor. On passing through the kitchen, he found the head of the cock and ate it. Elmeknun was much troubled by this matter and went again to Tekle Haimanot to seek his advice. He was told that the throne had passed again to the old dynasty. The angel of God had ordered Tekle Haimanot to anoint Yekuno Amlak as Emperor of Ethiopia and, furthermore, he had received a promise that one-third of the land would be given to him for the Church. The *Gedle Tekle Haimanot* also asserts that Yekuno Amlak restored the throne of his ancestors.¹²⁹

In *Be'ela Negest* which is, relatively, a more recent work than the previous one quoted, it is emphasized that the transfer of power to the old dynasty was achieved peacefully. It is claimed that, while Yekuno Amlak was in the forest preparing to fight the Zagwé Emperor, Tekle Haimanot approached him with the proposal that he would restore him to the throne if he made certain concessions to the Church. Yekuno Amlak agreed to grant one-third of the Empire to the Church and Tekle Haimanot crowned him Emperor of Ethiopia.¹³⁰ In actual fact both stories are possible first that the two rivals began by waging war against each other and secondly, that the Church sought to intervene in an attempt to solve the problem peacefully by compromise and agreement. Ne'akuto Le'ab on seeing the power of his opponent, was ready to accept any alternative solution.

The terms of the agreement were most probably drafted by the two ecclesiastics and they tried to satisfy both parties.

a) The Zagwé Emperor agreed to transfer power to the descendant of the Solomonic line. (Some sources claim that Ne'akuto Le'ab abdicated immediately in favour of Yekuno Amlak while others state that he agreed to transfer sovereignty upon his death.)

b) After the restoration of the old dynasty, the Zagwé dynasty did not cease to exist but continued to rule parts of the country, more specifically the region of Lasta.

c) The third term defined the relationship between the two monarchs. They were compelled to treat each other as brothers, therefore when a Zagwé descendant came to the court of the King he was permitted to beat his kettle drum and was not obliged to bow or prostrate himself before the Emperor but rather could go directly to him and kiss him.

d) The fourth term dealt with the promise of Yekuno Amlak to the two men. He gave one-third of the land to Tekle Haimanot, a gift therefore to the Church. The title and power of Aqabé Se'at he bestowed on Yesus Mo'a and on his successors as Abbots of Haik.



Middle picture is of Abuna Tekle Haimanot without wings.

Courtesy of Prof. J. Ch

¹²⁹ *Gedle Tekle Haimanot*, pp. 76-85. The story of a cock is found in old Kingdom of Kaffa (G. W. B. Huntingford, "The lives of saint Takla Haimanot": JES 4, 2 (1966), p. 36).

¹³⁰ C. Conti Rossini, "La caduta della dinastia Zagwé", pp. 313-314.

An anonymous Ethiopian chronicler recorded at a later date that the promise made to Yesus Mo'a was not upheld by later Emperors. No reason was given but one may presume that the political importance of the position led to the appointment of a man chosen by Emperor who would not be subject to the control of the Abbot of Haik. The other terms, however, were respected and observed. In the chronicle of Menelik II, Gəbre Sallasi related that whenever Wag - Shum Gobeze, Governor of Lasta, visited the Emperor went to the palace beating the drum. A dinner party was given in his honour. Before the reception he washed his hands in a golden basin.¹³¹

As far as church property is concerned, it is true that the Church possessed a great deal of land in central and northern Ethiopia but this actually amounted to less than one-third reputedly offered. With the change of dynasty relations between Church and State reached a new level. The Church, for its part, gained much from the change. It became a semi-independent institution with its own administrative and economic machinery. The Ichegé (the origins of this title are obscure but are attributed to Tekle Haimanot's successor) became the actual head of the Ethiopian Church responsible for Church affairs in general whether administrative or doctrinal. The Metropolitan's role was now largely limited to ordaining priests and deacons.¹³² Although the latter had now become more of a figurehead his presence was still essential for political stability. The Ichegé also acquired the right to appoint deans and heads of churches and monasteries. In cases of disputes arising among the clergy, he had the judicial power to settle them. He was the defender of the true faith that whenever heresy appeared he refuted it by correctly formulating the teaching of the Church.

The power of the Emperor over the Church diminished but did not disappear entirely. It was he who still sent envoys to request a Metropolitan from Alexandria, paying a considerable sum for that privilege. He also had a free hand in selecting and appointing the Ichegé. When controversies involving dogma arose, the two parties discussed the issues under the chairmanship, adducing evidence from the Holy Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers. In these cases, the Emperor was supposed to assume the role of arbitrator but instead, he often supported this or that party, according to his inclinations and matters sometimes ended in bloodshed. He was also responsible for appointments to some important churches and monasteries, such as the head of the Aksum Sion church. The Ethiopian view of relations between Church and State is summed up in the image of two eyes, two hands and two feet. Although picturesque, it gives us some idea of the nature of this union.

131. Guèbrè Sallasiè, *Chronique du règne de Ménélik II*, trans. M. de Coppet, (Paris, 1930), p. 356.

132. In doctrinal controversies, the Metropolitan played a minor role because he lacked sufficient theological education. Furthermore, he was always chosen from the Monastery of St. Anthony without regard to his educational background or his moral standards. Where disputes involving dogma could not be solved, the Emperor would write to the Patriarch of Alexandria requesting a solution.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RESTORATION OF THE SOLOMONIC DYNASTY

1. An Attempt for Consolidation

Yekuno Amlak, the first Emperor of the restored Solomonic line, was supposed to be a direct descendant of the old Aksumite Emperors, the last of whom had been Anbesawudem who had fled to Shewa and there lived out his life wandering from place to place to escape death at the hands of his enemies. The lists of the Emperors generally name about ten men including the uncrowned descendants of that dynasty. These are:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| a) Anbesawudem or Dil Ne'ad | f) Asfiha |
| b) Mahberewudem | g) Yacob |
| c) Agb'a Sion | h) Bahr Assegid |
| d) Sinfe Ari'd | i) Idm Assegid |
| e) Negash Zaré | j) Yekuno Amlak ¹ |

Surprisingly the name of Tesfa Yesus is not included in this list. Possibly he could be the same man as Edm Assegid as most Ethiopians had a secular name as well. The name found in the *Gedle Yessus Mo'a* is shorter and differs slightly.² One may connect many of these names with the desire to re-establish the Solomonic dynasty but whether they lived only during the three hundred years of Zagwé rule is debatable. Furthermore, the available sources are not reliable enough to be regarded as evidence that these same people were in fact descended from the old Aksumite dynasty. People of that period, however, found the arguments sufficiently convincing and the change of dynasty took place about 1270 A.D.

Immediately after the restoration, the first task of Yekuno Amlak was to consolidate his authority throughout the Empire. To achieve this he needed a Metropolitan. Although Tekle Haimanot had been instrumental in restoring the dynasty, Yekuno Amlak did not wish to retain him as a bishop. It was also true that his ordination had been a temporary measure and an illegal one. Nor was he acceptable to the conservative group who had actively supported the restoration. To them the change of dynasty meant a return to old traditions and practices. Therefore, the return to an Egyptian Metropolitan was made a condition of their support for the restoration. To consolidate his sovereignty and satisfy this group, Yekuno Amlak attempted to obtain a new Metropolitan through various channels.

1. W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, (London, 1877), p. 316.
 2. The names are: Girma Asferé, Dil Ne'ad, Mahbere Wudem, Negash Zaré, Wenag Seré, Anbesawudem and Tesfa Yesus. (S. Kur, *Actes de Iyasus Mo'a, CSCO, Scriptores Aethiopici*, Vol. I (Louvain, 1965), p. 23 (text).
 3. Moufazzal ibn Abil-Fazail, "Histoire des Sultans Mamlouks," ed. and trans. E. Blochet: *Patristica*, Vol. XIV, p. 383 ff.; C. Conti Rossini, "Sulle Missioni Domenicane in Etiopia nel secolo XIV": *Rivista dell'Accademia d'Italia, Atti*, serie 7, Vol. I, (1940), pp. 72-73; E. Cerulli, "L'Etiopia medievale in alcuni documenti di scrittori Arabi": *RSE* 3 (1943), p. 279 ff.; G. Wiet, "Les relations égypto-abyssines sous les sultans Mamlouks": *BSAC* 4 (1938), p. 117 ff.

In 1274-75 A.D. he wrote a letter to Rukn ad-Din Baybras which he sent via Hamdanid, the Imam of Yemen.⁴ In it he revealed that he had sent an envoy through Nubia (Kush) to Egypt to request a new Metropolitan. As the prelate had not yet arrived he entreated the Sultan to use his influence with the Patriarch to hasten the consecration. The man chosen was to be honest, well-educated and not greedy for gold and silver. He also asked that the prelate be sent to Awan (Yerer?), perhaps the name of his capital city. Later in the letter he mentioned that he was engaged in war. The number of his army exceeded 100,000 Muslim cavalry and as far as the number of Christians was concerned, they could not be counted! Of the Muslims who were coming to Ethiopia, he wrote that they were well treated and were permitted to travel throughout his Empire without interference. He also alluded to a plague which had apparently struck his country. This had been interpreted by the people as God's punishment because they had not yet acquired another Egyptian Metropolitan. It was therefore imperative that one should come and pray for his people.

There is a reference in the same letter to the plight of the Church in the kingdom of Nubia. An ambassador had arrived from Nubia (Kush) to announce the death of David, King of Nubia and the succession of his son. At that time Nubia was also experiencing difficulties in getting a bishop from the See of Alexandria and the Church there suffered greatly from a shortage of clergy. One of the tasks of this envoy was to request some priests from Ethiopia but as the Ethiopian Church was faced with the same problem, Yekuno Amlak could not assist. While in Ethiopia, the ambassador fell victim to the epidemic and died.

The Sultan's reply to the letter of Yekuno Amlak was both friendly and polite. In connection with the Metropolitan, he pointed out that none of the Ethiopian envoys had reached Egypt and that it would therefore be impossible to choose a Metropolitan having the qualities Yekuno Amlak sought without their being present. Indeed Baybras was really making excuses in order to hide his own intentions. Yekuno Amlak in fact was not on good terms with the Muslim population in Ethiopia. Although in his letter to the Sultan he presented himself as a pro-Muslim Christian Emperor, relations were not friendly. His son and successor, Yagb'a Sion remarked: "Pour moi, ajoutoit ce prince, je ne ressemble nullement à mon père; mais je protège les musulmans, dans toute l'étendue de mon royaume."⁵ Moufazzal also refers to a rebellion by the Muslim governor of the northern Ethiopians who had prevented Yekuno Amlak's envoy to the Sultan of Egypt from continuing his journey.⁶ On the other hand, we learn from an Arabic chronicle of Harar that Dil-marrah a Muslim ruler, had asked for asylum at the court of Yekuno Amlak after his defeat by Da-gamis in 1279. His intention in seeking asylum was, of course, to avenge his defeat⁷ with the assistance of Yekuno Amlak. What is underlined in this chronicle is the disintegration of Muslim power in Ethiopia presumably as a result of the political and military efforts made by Yekuno Amlak to consolidate his position. It would seem that Baybras had heard of the situation and, as a reciprocal gesture, refused to approve the consecration of a new Metropolitan for Ethiopia.

The third way in which Yekuno Amlak consolidated power was through culture.

4. The Ethiopian envoy arrived in Yemen in 1279 A.D. bearing precious gifts. S. Labib, *Handelsgeschichte Aegyptens in spätmittelalter* (1171-1517), (Wiesbaden, 1965), p. 90.

5. Et. Quatremère, *Mémoires géographiques et historiques sur l'Égypte*, 2 Vols., (Paris, 1811), Vol. II, p. 268.

6. *Pat. Or., op.cit.*, p. 387; E. Cerulli, *op.cit.*, p. 278 ff.

7. E. Cerulli, "Il Sultanato dello Scioa nel secolo XIII secondo un nuovo documento storico": *RSE*, 1 (1941), pp. 16-17; Marco Polo captures the extreme tension of the situation. E.D. Ross, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, (London, 1931), pp. 347-352; C. Conti Rossini, "Marco Polo e l'Etiopia": *Atti del R. Istituto veneto*, Vol. XCIX (1940), pp. 56-57.

He continued the construction of monolithic churches at Lasta, a project which had begun by Lalibela. One of these churches is the Genete Mariam church not far from Ro. The style of architecture resembles that of Bete Medhane Alem. It is rectangular in shape and is supported by two pillars from outside on the north and west. According to local tradition it was built in the first year of his reign. It is not only an example of a highly sophisticated architectural monument but also contains a masterpiece of art. The interior walls are covered with vivid frescoes accompanied by explanatory legends. Facing east on the left pillar, there is a commemorative inscription which reads: በአኩራተ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ዘ ፅኑ ፡ እነ ፡ ይኩኖ ፡ አምላክ ፡ ዘእንገሠኒ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ በፈቃዱ ፡ ናሕዮ ፡ በክርስቶስ ፡ አቡዮ ፡ ላዕከነኒ ፡ ወአሐንፅ ፡ ቤተ ፡ ዛቲ ፡ ቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ በስሙ ፡ መጣፅ ፡ ይምሐረኒ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ በሙሥተ ፡ ሰማያት ፡ ምስለ ፡ አባጥንዮ ፡ መሐረ ፡ አምላክ ፡ አሜን ።

The inscription has both literary and historical significance. An approximate translation would be:

"By the grace of God I King Yekuno Amlak, after I had come to the throne by will of God, built this church. We live in Christ who helped me to build this church in the name of Metta. The merciful God have mercy upon me and upon Abewano in the kingdom of heaven, Amen."

The text makes it very clear that Yekuno Amlak was king and that this kingdom was given by God Himself, thus naturally intended for the elect of God. He dedicated the church to Abba Metta or Libanos. The Aksumite as well as the Zagwé Emperors had a special reverence for this saint who, according to Church tradition, came to Ethiopia in the first century AD. from the Near East.

As we already know, Lalibela built a monolithic church in his name. Available sources do not explain why this particular reverence for Libanos existed but it would seem that he was the patron saint of the Ethiopian Emperors at that time. Abewano seems to be a foreign name and probably refers to someone who contributed to the construction of the church. It is clear from the inscription that deep religious feeling inspired Yekuno Amlak. He did not build this church as a commemoration but out of a sense of righteousness.

The text is written in good, comprehensible, vocalized Ge'ez. The letters are very clear and legible. Nor does the vocabulary present us with any difficulties except for the last line which is hardly visible. It is interesting to note that we do not possess a single inscription from the whole period of the Zagwé dynasty except for the names of the saints which are engraved above their bas-reliefs, for example, ፈርቆስ. None of the eleven monolithic churches of Roha contains an inscription. It is generally believed that the secular literary revival since the Aksumite period occurred during the reign of Yekuno Amlak. His inscription, which is the first to be written by a king since Aksumite times, supports this idea. This period of cultural revival continued until the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁸

Yekuno Amlak reigned from 1270-1285 AD. During this period he not only restored the old dynasty but also inaugurated a cultural revival and improved administration. According to tradition, he founded his capital city in the region of Tegulet ተጉለት fir where he administered his Empire. It is clear from the inscription that craftsmen were available at that time although no reference is made to the construction of a palace himself. It was characteristic of the new dynasty as well as the old not to attach too much importance to buildings and monuments. It would appear that the Emperor did not

8. I. Guidi, *Storia della letteratura etiopica*, (Milano, 1932), p. 8.

in one specific place but rather that he selected one area where he passed the rainy season. The rest of the year he spent travelling through his Empire. In later times it became the practice for the Emperor to do this before and after his coronation. Nevertheless, the lack of a permanent capital city did not hinder the continued development of Ethiopian civilization.

CONCLUSION

In this book we have covered approximately 2,000 years from the beginning of Ethiopian civilization to the end of the reign of Yekuno Amlak. During this period, Ethiopian civilization underwent change and development without losing its characteristic features. As we have seen, there were three distinct periods in its history: Aksumite, Zagwean and Shewan, each name originating from the locality where the new power arose. A change in the location of the centre of power always has an effect on a civilization but in the case of Ethiopia, the effects were minimal. Only the external features of the civilization were affected, not its essence. The Aksumite civilization was the model and prototype, the fundamental base from which even the civilization which exists today is only a further extension. It is rare in world history to find a civilization with roots so far back in time. Usually change or decay leaves its mark. Ethiopian civilization experienced only transitory change. Its physical centre altered but not its characteristic features and substance.

The Zagwean period, which can be described as medieval, developed from the Aksumite civilization. As in other Christian countries, greater emphasis was placed on architecture, especially church building. The monolithic churches of Roha were a continuation of the Aksumite style but at the same time there is evidence of the inevitable progress which takes place with the passage of time.

The third stage, that of the Shewan civilization coincides with the period of the Renaissance. The revival of culture experienced in Western Europe occurred also in Ethiopia. In other words, the Shewan period was merely an extension of the Aksumite civilization but this did not preclude the possibility of other influences.

During all three periods Christian principles permeated the ideas and attitudes of the people. Literature, art, music and architecture all expressed Christian ideas and served religious objectives. Thus the three periods were interconnected but each developed its own characteristic features as a response to progress and change.

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